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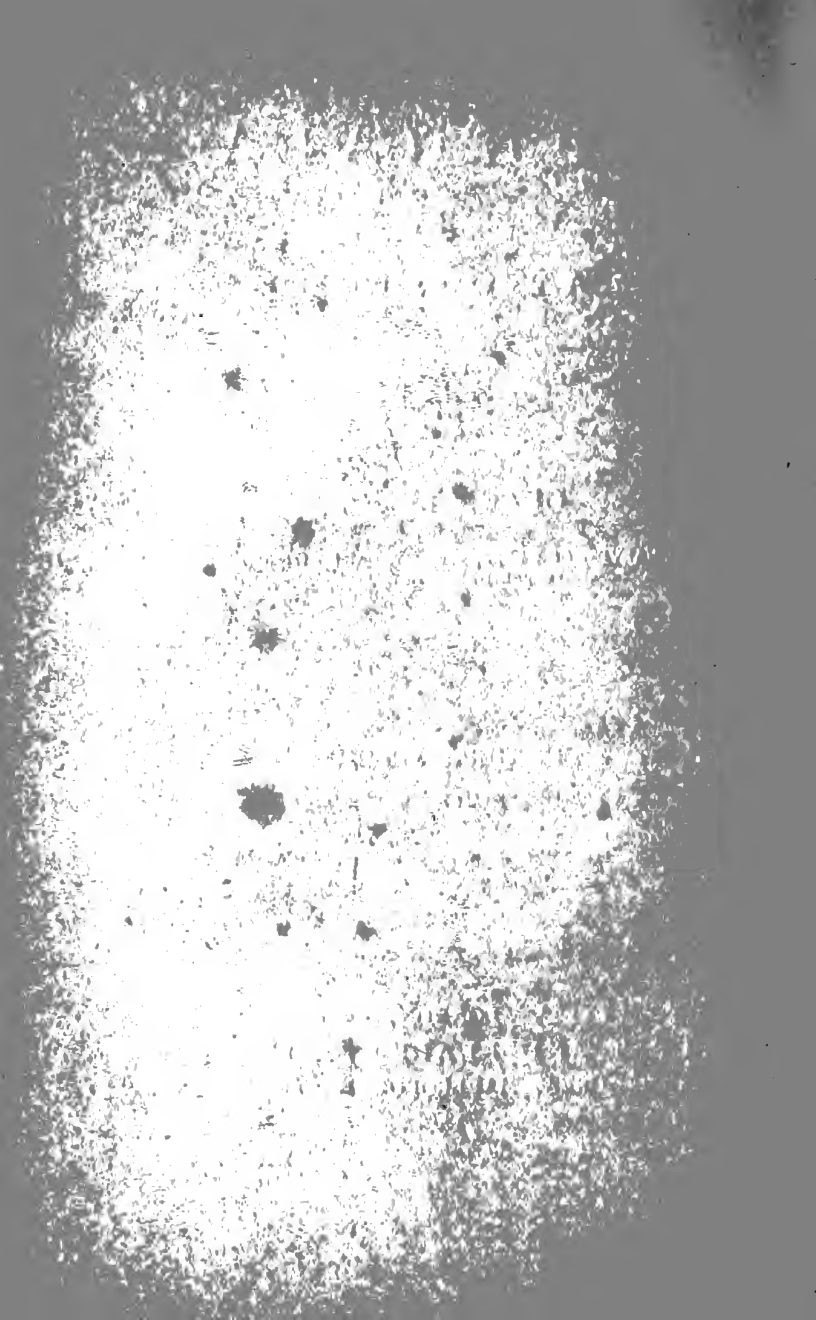
VOL. I.

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James Ray 30 July 51 Budget 30



BOOK I

P E N H A L A .

CHAPTER I.

PENHALA'S HOUSE.

NOT 'Penhala House;' mark that; but, 'Penhala's House.' The name had been given to it by the fisher-folk of Carn Ruth while it was in course of building. Perhaps there had been a suggestion of good-humoured satire in their fashion of making a large mouthful of the words. For Carn Ruth had held up its hands and turned up its eyes in open wonder as the walls began

to rise from the ground, and show what sort of dwelling this was that old Joshua Penhala was building for himself, among the pines on the upland above the little fishing town.

In what way had he and his forbears differed from themselves? farming their few acres industriously, and living from hand to mouth as all the rest of them did, as far back as the mind of man could carry them. .And now, behold! Because Joshua had found out a few things about wheels and cranks, and such like gear, for lightening the labour in the mines, and because some of the biggest mining lords had taken his inventions up, and spread the use of them to other mining centres—because he was getting to be talked about a little, the silly old man was puffed up with pride, and was going to set up for a gentleman all at once. And as the Carn Ruth folks

watched the walls of the stately mansion rise from the ruins of the old farm-house, and realised what sort of dwelling it was that their neighbour was building for himself, they shook their heads very solemnly indeed, and expressed their hopes audibly to one another, that the pride of the Penhalas might not come down as quickly as it had lifted itself up.

But there did not seem to be much fear of that. The present owner of the house was not yet born when the house was built, and he was now a man of middle-age, and still there was no sign of financial difficulty among the Penhalas. Socially, too, they were an altogether different set of people to the Penhalas of fifty years ago. When the Mr. Penhala of to-day walked or rode down the Carn Ruth high-street, the greetings of the people he met were of the kind offered by the working-classes to their

‘betters.’ And it said much for him, being a new man, that they were given ungrudgingly. With all their surface radicalism, these sturdy Cornish folk are conservative enough at the core; not quick to take up with new notions, and slow to dispossess themselves of old; and yet, at the period with which this history has to do, the name of Penhala had made for itself a recognised position among all classes of them—fisher-folk, farmers, and fine county gentry into the bargain.

A thoroughly popular man was Lance Penhala; and the Carn Ruth people could have given no more certain proof of his popularity with them, than by their openly expressed regret that his son ‘dedn’t favvor un mowr.’

‘The very moral of his mother, the lad wor, for sure; and ’twas a shaame, aw, that ’twas, that he shud favvor her, when nature

had purvided un weth such a braave looking clain-off Cornishman of a father by way of example.'

It was a breathless, scorching afternoon in July, breathless even here, on the edge of the Atlantic, where, as a rule, there is more or less agitation in the atmosphere the whole year through.

It is true that Penhala's house stands high, and on the south-west side, where the pines have been cleared for a wide stretch, there is nothing but a half mile of gently sloping lawn between the windows and the open ocean. But even on that exposed upland, the summer air was still and sultry on this especial afternoon—the afternoon of the Carn Ruth flower-show—and especially was it so in there under the tent, which had been set up to protect the cottagers' cherished blossoms from the too

impetuous greetings of the Carn Ruth breezes, which for once were conspicuous by their absence only.

Lancelot Penhala, just finishing his inaugural speech, was visibly affected by the unusual closeness, there was a suggestion of fatigue in the way he supported himself with one hand on the table at his side, his voice was less resonant than usual, and his relief—when he reached the end of his ‘few opening remarks,’ and stepped down from the low crimson cloth dais—was obvious to every person in the little crowd.

‘Maaster Penhala’s gettin’ to look aulder than he shud,’ one observed, quietly, to another.

And the other answered,

‘Aw, it looks like it for sure; and ‘tain’t years, nither; he’s nobbut haalf way between forty and fifty, caan’t be; I re-

member the feasting and jinks at his christening as if 'twere but yesterday.'

'Aw, aw!' returned the first speaker, 'but theer's mowar things than years go to the makking of an auld man, Jabez auld lad.'

And Jabez looked wise and solemn, and shook his hoary head, and muttered an acquiescent 'Aw, aw!' under his breath, with a glance round him at his neighbours on either side, as if to assure himself against being overheard, and moved away to avoid any further conversation in the same strain.

The cause of Mr. Penhala's haggard looks was evidently not a subject for open discussion among his humbler neighbours; but those among his equals apparently saw no necessity for the observance of an equal discretion.

There was a new vicar at Carn Ruth,

and his wife being young, pretty, and well-born, had been 'taken up' by old Lady Penruddach. Whether it was purely from kindness of heart on her ladyship's part, or whether because it was such a delight to the old woman to have a new listener, to whom to retail her endless stories and gossip, is an open question, and perhaps not a very important one, since Mrs. Yarlstoke's pleasure in hearing the family histories of her husband's new parishioners was certainly equal to Lady Penruddach's in relating them.

The two ladies wandered away from the tent now, upon the conclusion of Penhala's speech, glad to get out of the heat and crush. They could look at the cottagers' flowers later on, when the sun was less powerful, Lady Penruddach said. What they wanted to do for the next two hours

was to keep themselves as cool as was possible under the circumstances.

So they took their way across the south slope, which was the name of the lawn on which the tent was pitched, and made straight for the terrace on the east side of the house, away from the chattering crowd and the overpowering scent of the blossoms, and, above all, away from the blistering heat of the July sun.

Mrs. Yarlstoke swept a glance along the front of the grand gray-stone house as they went. Perhaps it looked better from this particular point than anywhere. There was no clear view of it from end to end except from the south slope. On the other sides, it was more or less masked by its sheltering belts of firs. And even from the avenue on the east, you only caught an occasional glimpse of a chimney-stack or

window, until you were well up under the walls; and no building shows to advantage without a little of the enchantment which distance lends to a picture.

From the south slope you got this effect of distance; and the result was charming.

‘It is a very lovely old house,’ said the vicar’s wife, after that comprehensive look of hers. ‘It seems a thousand pities that there should be no lady to preside over its affairs. How long has Mr. Penhala been a widower, Lady Penruddach?’

‘Have you some fascinating little friend in your mind’s eye for the vacant post, my dear?’ asked Lady Penruddach, with a shrewd smile on her worldly old face. ‘I’m afraid Penhala is a hopeless case. His wife has been dead nine years, and he has never shown the faintest desire to replace her.’

‘And has he no female relation who

would play housekeeper for him?' Mrs. Yarlstoke chose to ignore her new friend's innuendo; it was not in the best taste, she thought. 'No cousin nor sister who would come to him? A woman does so much to civilise a home, I think.'

'No; he has no female relation whatever. At the present moment the house of Penhala consists of the man we have just been listening to and his only son—a lad of twenty—a shockingly spoilt boy.'

There was a touch of disgust in Mrs. Yarlstoke's manner as she answered:

'Oh, yes; I've seen the son. He has attended choir practice every Wednesday night since we have been here.'

'Choir practice!' snapped out Lady Penruddach. 'What on earth is John Penhala doing at choir practice?' and she turned a quick suspicious look on the pretty pleasant face at her side, as if she

half expected to find the answer there.

Mrs. Yarlstoke laughed a little as she met the look, but the laugh in no degree lessened the disquiet of her manner.

‘That is just what I have been asking myself lately,’ she said. ‘He certainly does not come to sing, neither does he come out of civility to the vicar or me, for as often as not he does not even bid us a Good evening. But he comes as regularly as the rest of them; and I am a little worried about it. I don’t think it ought to go on; and yet it is difficult to see how to stop it. If we had been here longer it would be different—it is so difficult for new people—folks will say we are mischief-makers. I wish I knew what to do for the best.’

‘I suppose it is that little minx, Hagar Polwhele,’ said her ladyship; and when Mrs. Yarlstoke bent her head by way of reply, the old woman gave a snort of

disgust, and settled herself in a garden chair, and shut down her parasol in a series of vicious jerks, which expressed her opinion of the whole affair sufficiently well without the aid of words.

‘I had heard something of this before,’ she said, presently; ‘but because it came to me through the servants, I tried not to think anything of it. Mrs. Polwhele is a London woman, and the Carn Ruth people don’t like her; so I thought there might be a spice of spite in this story against her daughter. I thought the girl was going to marry the man who sings tenor in the choir—that giant from the Cluth-hoe mine?’

‘Morris Edyvean, you mean. I believe there was something of the sort, until young Penhala came on the scene. I suppose it is natural that the girl should prefer to be seen home by a gentleman?’

‘I suppose it is natural she should be a

little fool,' retorted the elder lady. 'However, I mean to put a stop to the nonsense. It is not a pleasant matter to interfere in, but somebody will have to do it, unless the thing is to go on to the usual ending. I should be sorry to see the boy make a fool of himself. A lad with old Joshua Penhala's blood in him should do better than that. I'll speak to his father myself; before I go home this afternoon.'

Mrs. Yarlstoke was a little surprised at the temerity of this decision.

'I'm afraid it will be a very unpleasant thing to do,' she said, with the air of gentle decorum which seemed to her the proper thing for the occasion.

But Lady Penruddach smiled like the toughened old warrior she was.

'Pooh! That side of the question doesn't trouble me,' she said. 'It is only that one would rather not be the first per-

son to create dissension between father and son. Lancelot Penhala has simply worshipped that boy.'

'Still,' protested the parson's wife, with her primness a little accentuated, to show that she held to her own view of the question, 'still it would certainly be less unpleasant to discuss the matter with a lady. It is such a pity the boy has no female relation that one can go to.'

'I don't think poor Henrietta Penhala would have been of much use in such an affair as this in any case,' observed Lady Penruddach, with a slight movement of her fat shoulders. 'She was the only female relation the lad ever had, except his mother; but nobody would ever have thought of consulting her in such an affair as this; she muddled her own matters so hopelessly.'

Mrs. Yarlstoke looked interested.

‘This boy’s aunt, was she?’ she asked.

‘Yes; his father’s only sister—one of the prettiest creatures I ever saw, but as flighty as a kitten. Did you see that tall, clumsily-built man, with the deep-set eyes and the square jaw, who stood behind Lancelot Penhala, when he was making his speech just now?’

‘You mean the man with a quantity of crisp fair hair? Yes, I noticed him; a peculiar looking man I thought him.’

‘That is Stanislaus Petrovsky, the man poor Henrietta Penhala ran away with. I was very surprised to see him here to-day. Lance Penhala has received him once or twice in London, but this is his first appearance down here, in the family stronghold.’

‘Was it a very romantic affair?’ asked Mrs. Yarlstoke. ‘Petrovsky—a Russian name, is it?’

‘Russian or Polish, or something of the kind. Romantic? Well, I daresay that is what Henrietta thought it when she ran away with him, but I am afraid the poor soul had time to alter her mind during her two years of married life. I believe they were in absolute want during the last year of her life.’

‘Want! But surely she had money?’

‘My dear, yes. But Petrovsky got rid of it all in no time. Don’t ask me how, because I don’t know. I have heard a whisper that he is mixed up with some of these secret societies in Russia, and that would account for the disappearance of the money. I know that he was a political refugee when Henrietta married him. He had to leave Russia in a great hurry to save his head, and they confiscated his estates in his absence, so he must have done something very bad. When he first

came over he gave riding-lessons in London, just to keep the wolf from the door. He is a gentleman, you know—a prince, I believe he is really—and when Henrietta met him in society she fell in love with him at first sight, and arranged to take riding-lessons, which she did not want, from him. Well, he was poor, and in great trouble, and he can be most fascinating when he likes, and his eyes are perfectly wonderful when you are near him, a brilliant, dark blue, and the combination of attractions was too much for poor Henrietta Penhala. In less than a fortnight from the date of her first riding-lesson she was missing. Then came a telegram announcing her marriage to Petrovsky, and there was an end of her. They went on the Continent at once—the wretched man found it more convenient for his treasonable practices, I suppose—

and the next thing we heard of her was that she was dead—died almost in want, I believe—and that she had left a week-old baby boy behind her. When Lance heard of it he wanted to have the boy, to bring up with his own. There was ten years' difference in the boys' ages, but he thought it would do Master John good to have another child in the house. But for some reason or another Petrovsky refused the offer, and chose to drag the child about with him from pillar to post, among the scum and sediment of European political society, and a delightful young scamp he has become by this time, I expect.'

'He is still alive?'

'Oh, yes. He is here with his father. I have not seen him, but I hear he is a wonderfully precocious lad; far too old for his age. But then what else could you

expect from his bringing-up. He is out yachting with John. Be-calmed, I suppose they are, or we should have had the pleasure of their company. When I saw Petrovsky here this afternoon, I thought of the boy at once. Is it on his account his father is here? Petrovsky is as deep as the sea—he is not here for nothing. Is he going to bleed Lance Penhala? I hope Lance won't give him a penny, not even for the boy. Whatever money passes into his possession is melted in the one crucible—The Cause. If Lance is wise, and wants to do the boy good, he will pay his school-bills direct to the school-master, and not let Petrovsky have the fingering of a single coin.'

'You think he would appropriate it to his own uses? Surely he would not be so dishonest, Lady Penruddach?'

Lady Penruddach smiled again. She

found the freshness of the parson's decorous little wife rather amusing, even while she half-doubted its genuineness.

‘ These conspirators have another name for it, my dear,’ she said. ‘ What we ignoramus would call dishonesty, they call patriotism. “ The Cause ” is their whole creed ; and nothing else—honour, truth, honesty—is of the slightest consequence by comparison. On other matters their ideas of right and wrong are as clear as yours or mine perhaps, it is only when the good of The Cause is in question that the rules which govern other people’s conduct have no meaning for them. This man, Petrovsky, for instance—if Lance Penhala were to hand a thousand pounds over to him for the education of his boy, he would consider it his sacred duty to pass it on at once to one of his rascally centres, for the manufacture of bombs, or

the printing of seditious pamphlets. There is not one of them who would not sell his soul for money, if the price offered were large enough to compensate The Cause for the loss of a supporter. It is a grand idea, too, when you take the trouble to look into it. It is martyrdom under another name; one of the last real enthusiasms left to us in this over-civilised nineteenth century.

Mrs. Yarlstoke opened her pretty brown eyes at this expression of approval; she was beginning to think that the people in the parish she had left must be a little behind their generation. But though she was startled she was candidly interested. It was delightful to find herself in contact with a person of the Petrovsky type. The experience was altogether new to her. The parish in which she had lived since her marriage, was one of those quiet, humdrum,

correct communities, which go on their way, year in year out, without the faintest excitement to break their formal monotony. Tennis-parties, at-homes, and an occasional carpet-dance, had hitherto given sufficient variety to her life to satisfy her most lofty ambition, but those innocent forms of dissipation faded into insipidity by the side of this new experience. To hold personal communication with a man who was more than suspected of complicity in the nihilist movement—and a prince to boot! What an enchanting piece of news to send in her next letter to her staid, plodding Essex friends; those friends who had so pathetically bemoaned her fate in being ‘banished to an outlandish, uncivilised parish, at the extreme end of Cornwall.’ How gladly they would have submitted to banishment under similar conditions.

She was a good little thing, this pleasant,

pretty matron of twenty-nine, and she was very determined to do her duty in that state of life into which it had pleased God to call her, but it was a fact that, for the present, all thoughts of parochial affairs—of choir practisings, and clandestine meetings between young men and women of great social disparity, and all such trifling matters—were completely driven out of her head by the more interesting subject of Petrovsky, the Patriot and Prince!

Some time later in the afternoon, Lady Penruddach, with a mind still full of the story she had heard from Mrs. Yarlstoke, contrived to secure a *tête-à-tête* with Stanislaus Petrovsky. She had come to the decision that, after all, men were better judges of these matters than women. Petrovsky was a man of the world, he would know how to handle the affair better than she; she would tell him every-

thing, and leave it to him to manage things his own way.

If John had only been at home himself, the well-meaning old woman would probably have gone straight to him. But John was out yachting, and was not expected home until the wind shifted a point or two ; for the Carn Ruth harbour was one of those awkward little havens, common enough on that stretch of coast, which can only be entered with safety when there is exactly the right amount of wind blowing, from exactly the right quarter.

But for this accidental absence of John's, the chances are that Stanislaus Petrovsky would have accomplished the purpose of his visit to Penhala, and gone his way back to the Continent again, without hearing a word to his nephew's disadvantage.

On such trivial chances as these, as far as our finite vision reveals to us, does our

destiny for good or evil depend. And yet who dares to assert that in all God's scheme of creation there exists such a thing as chance?

And, even if one be found bold enough to assert it, how shall he prove it? How?

CHAPTER II.

PETROVSKY TAKES THE REINS.

It was in the Penhala dining-room that the confidential interview between Lady Penruddach and Petrovsky took place. She had asked for a cup of tea, and he had taken her there to get it; for Penhala, with his usual lavish hospitality, was keeping open house to-day, and the appetite that could not find something to suit its taste among the variety and profusion of the Penhala tables, would have been hard to please indeed.

When he had attended to Lady Penruddach's wants, Petrovsky provided himself with a large plateful of early raspberries, which he dressed with sugar and port-wine, and attacked with great enjoyment, much to the old English-woman's amusement.

But she had something far more important to discuss with her host's brother-in-law than his infantile love of sweets, and she was not given to straw-splitting when she had once made up her mind to a course of action.

In a very few minutes Petrovsky knew all she knew concerning the flirtation between Hagar Polwhele and John Penhala, and he also knew what she suspected of Mrs. Polwhele's influence in the affair.

'The very spirit of mischief must be in the boy,' she declared, irritably moving her fan to and fro violently, as if she must

needs find some outlet for her vexation, and making herself very hot with the exertion. 'To think that he must needs go and mix himself up with that particular family! I should like to give him a good shaking.'

Petrovsky smiled at her excess of energy; up to the present he was not at all interested in the affair; this red-faced old lady was doubtless exaggerating the whole thing, as her kind always did.

'Then it is not the indiscretion itself which arouses your anger,' he said, 'but John's want of taste in his choice of the object.' Petrovsky's English was perfect; the only sign of unfamiliarity he ever gave was the choice of a stilted phrase now and again.

'It is because I know what the girl's mother is,' snapped back her ladyship, her irritation increased by his cynical tone.

‘I hear a good deal about the Carn Ruth people from my maid—who is a Carn Ruth woman herself—and this girl’s mother bears anything but a good character in the town. If she once gets John Penhala in her clutches, he will have to pay a pretty price to get free again—one does not need to be very far-sighted to see that. I’ll be bound she has done more to encourage the boy’s folly than the girl herself. I understood the child was going to marry one of the captains from the Cluth-hoe mine. Morris Edyvean doesn’t look the man to stand aside and give place to another. He’ll be another person for John to reckon with, if harm comes to the girl. Altogether, Mr. Petrovsky, your nephew has made about the biggest mess of it that was possible. I should not like to be the person to tell Lancelot Penhala of his son’s folly.’

‘Why?’ asked Petrovsky, still eating his raspberries with that faint smile of amusement on his colourless face. ‘Lance does not take much heed of the cost, so long as his darling is pleased. That last whim of his—to go to Italy to have his voice trained—do you know what it cost his father? Two thousand pounds! Two thousand pounds for a whim. What use is he ever likely to make of his voice? Then this craze for drawing-room magic. They spend a small fortune on the folly. And now, if he has a fancy for a pretty face, do you think his father would refuse it to him, or trouble himself about the consequences?’

‘Yes, I do!’ Lady Penruddach was getting horribly angry with this wretched foreigner, who took so little interest in his nephew, that he could not lay down his spoon and give the boy’s affairs a serious

thought. 'I do think Penhala would trouble himself very much indeed about this business. He has spoilt the boy, of course,—we all know that,—but I am certain he would not encourage him in selfish vice. Lance Penhala is a gentleman, Mr. Petrovsky; if John brings this girl to shame, and it comes to his father's ears, there will be permanent mischief between them, you may take my word for it.'

'But it would not matter much in the long run, would it? However angry the good Lance might be, he has not the power to punish the boy very severely. He could not threaten to disinherit him, for instance. Your English law of primogeniture would step in to prevent that.'

'You are wrong, even in that view of the case!' retorted the angry old woman, too exasperated by his persistent attitude of indifference, to give much heed to her own

words. 'Even from the lowest standpoint of all, John is committing a fatal error, in arousing his father's anger, for the Penhala money has never been settled. The man who made it all—this man's grandfather—left it by will to his eldest son, and he left it in the same way to Lancelot. The house and land—the old farmstead, in fact—must go down from father and son. But what good would Penhala's house do anybody without the money to keep it up? And the money Lancelot can will as he pleases.'

There was not the faintest show of surprise or excitement in Petrovsky's manner as he listened. He went on methodically spooning up large spoonfuls of his crushed raspberries and port-wine, with every outward sign of enjoyment. And yet if, at that moment, the luscious mess could have been changed by some trick into a heap of sea-sand, he would probably have gone on

spooning it up, without a change of countenance, in complete ignorance of the transformation. In that earlier part of his life which had been spent at the Russian Court—before he had been compelled by an unfortunate mistake on the part of one of his servants, as to the destination of two letters which he had to deliver, to fly for his life from the presence of the sovereign whose death he had schemed to encompass, even while in receipt of his personal favours—during that period of perpetual dissimulation, when it had grown to be a second nature with him to act always outwardly in direct opposition to his actual feelings—even in those trying years he had, perhaps, never experienced a more sudden surprise than at this moment, when Lady Penrud-dach made that matter-of-fact announcement—‘And the money Lance can will as he pleases.’

But, startled as he was, the vivid instincts of his old training were too firmly implanted in his nature, to allow any token of his astonishment to escape him.

The money that this impetuous old lady spoke of so easily, the money that Lance 'could bequeath as he pleased,' what was it that Petrovsky had heard about it? Surely it was some great sum—great even in the estimation of a Russian noble? Was it a quarter of a million sterling, or more? His wife—the poor sentimental Henrietta—had had thirty thousand as her marriage portion. And of what immense use that thirty thousand had been! It had almost accomplished one of the greatest ends he and his fellow-workers had in view—almost! But the money had reached its end first. That was always the way of it. These levers, prepared with such infinite pains and exquisite ingenuity for the

overtoppling of dynastic oppression, perfect as they were in themselves, failed always from the one cause, want of money. Money was the only fulcrum which would raise the levers, and money was the one needful thing lacking among the workers. And here, lying at the feet of one of the most earnest of the brotherhood, was money ; heaps of it ; and all that was needed was a little skill in the manner of stooping to pick it up. Stoop ? Of course it was needful to stoop, it might even be needful to go on stooping until the back grew double, and it was no longer possible to recover an upright position at will. But of what account was that, against the gain to The Cause ? A quarter of a million sterling ! and to complain because the picking of it up might produce a pain in the back !

No wonder there was no longer any taste in the raspberries and port ! No

wonder there was a rather long silence between the two people in the stately dining-room of Penhala's house.

Lady Penruddach was enjoying her little triumph over her antagonist, and would not break the silence, imputing it to his inability to reply.

It was not until the plateful of wine and fruit had disappeared, and Petrovsky's beard—flaxen and crisp like his hair—had been carefully cleansed from the last suggestion of sticky moisture, that he spoke again.

‘That is news to me,’ he said then, showing at last a natural amount of interest in the subject, ‘and I am surprised. I knew the Penhalas had not won their wealth by robbing their weaker neighbours, at the date of the Norman Conquest, as so many of the Old English families boast of doing. I even think I knew that

their money had been gained honestly, and that they had not always been rich. But, for all that, I was under the impression that nine-tenths of their possessions were bound to descend from father to son in the direct line, as they do in other families. I confess this news has altered my view of the matter, Lady Penruddach. And you really believe that if Lance heard of John's youthful indiscretion he would disinherit him? Well, perhaps that is going a little too far. After all, it is nothing absolutely unpardonable that our dear boy has done, and we must take care that in his ignorance of the world he is not led into deeper folly, that he is not led into doing anything that would really rouse his father to such extreme measures.' Her ladyship gave a sharp snort of contempt; she always declared she had lived too long in the world to have any faith

left in human nature, but she was disgusted all the same whenever she found a fellow-creature impervious to all considerations but those of loss and gain,—‘and if I can do John a good turn I will. I owe it to his father’s son—Lancelot has undertaken the education of my boy Paul, Lady Penruddach; he has behaved most generously to me; I shall be glad to be able to make him some little return by freeing John from this fix, if he will permit me to. But you must not expect too much from my interference, Lady Penruddach; boys at his age are not fond of taking advice.’

‘Very well then,’ said her ladyship, closing her fan with a snap and rising abruptly.

In spite of all his elaborate caution there was something in the Russian’s manner, as he announced his willingness

to serve his brother-in-law, which grated on her sense of fitness ; the true ring was wanting in his declaration of good-will ; she instinctively mistrusted him, and wished she had acted on her first impulse and gone straight to Penhala himself.

‘ Will you order my carriage, if you please ? ’ she said, closing the discussion at once with a promptness peculiarly her own. She did not care to hear any more of Petrovsky’s anxiety to help John, and there were very few people in the world who could make Lady Penruddach do a thing against her own will.

The shrewd old woman had rightly guessed the Russian’s motive for this visit to Carn Ruth. There was another big affair approaching a crisis, in that mysterious territory known as ‘ Underground Russia,’ and the lot of chief instrument having fallen upon Petrovsky, it had be-

come necessary for him to put his head in the lion's mouth again—in other words, to return to Russia, where, if the authorities once got wind of his presence there, his life would be measured by days. Under these circumstances he had at last devoted a little thought to his duty as a father, and this pilgrimage to Carn Ruth was the result.

Having once obtained Penhala's promise to look after the boy Paul for a few years, there was no longer a single human anxiety to stand between him and his devotion to any dangerous duty The Cause might demand of him. Paul's future once assured, he was willing to risk his life, or to lose it, at any moment, if the loss would advance by so much as a hair's-breadth the movement for which he had already sacrificed so much. It was true that to-night he had found cause to regret that his stay

in Cornwall was of necessity so limited. Had his time been his own, he could surely have put that startling information concerning the Penhala heritage to some good use. Short as his time was—for by that day fortnight he was due in a tiny village, close to the railway, on the borders of the Caucasian province—he yet hoped to do something towards turning the news to his own purposes. If Paul had been but a few years older! But, child as he was, he would have to trust him. And indeed there were many grown men to whom he would less willingly have confided a perilous scheme than this little lad of eleven. These years of association with the most advanced thinkers in the movement, had had the right effect on the boy's heart and mind; through and through he was just what his father would have had him; the

blood of the true martyr breed was already in him—to his boyish enthusiasm the world and all it held was as nothing, when weighed against the progress of The Cause. And this being so, his father had decided to take him into his confidence with regard to the Penhala heritage.

Petrovsky sighed in spirit as he came to the conclusion. He was human, after all, and Paul was his only child, and it was hard on the boy that all the joyousness of his childhood should be extinguished by these eternal plots. These few days he had spent in his uncle's house, he had been as bright and happy and thoughtless as a boy of his age had a right to be. It had seemed as though he had left all his young precocity, his fits of heavy thought, his crude, childish plans for the wholesale extinction of their enemies, behind him, with the people who had fostered them.

And his father had been glad to see the change, and had even felt some faint hope that, as the boy grew up among his mother's prosaic English relations, his sympathy with The Cause might weaken, and he might be allowed to develop into a peaceful citizen of the British Empire, contented, placid, and respectable.

But now he knew this thing was impossible. The Cause demanded yet another victim, and, though it was his own son, he could not withhold the sacrifice.

What he could not do himself in the matter of the Penhala heritage, must be left in Paul's hands to accomplish; in Paul's small hands, broad and square at the finger tips; in Paul's hands, which would grow larger with the on-coming years, and stronger, and more capable of grasping and keeping a hold on what they grasped.

And having come to this decision he

went down and dined *tête-à-tête* with his host, and made himself agreeable during the meal, and slept for a few hours afterwards—the light wary sleep that is habitual with these opponents of established authority, a sleep which leaves their sense of hearing still on outpost duty at the portals of their understanding, eternally on guard against a surprise.

He was up and out again in the morning before any of the resident household were astir; his brain was too busy to tolerate inaction once its need of rest was satisfied. He heard the stable-clock strike five as he descended the echoing staircase, and made his way out into the freshness of the summer's morning. The sultry stillness of the preceding day had given place to a south-westerly breeze, which met him as he opened the terrace door, and wooed him with kisses sweet with

the unadulterated freshness of the broad Atlantic.

His life had been too full of projects and plans to leave him any leisure for the adoration of Nature; but standing there this morning, in that exquisite silence, to which the faint murmur of the tide on the rocks below served rather as an accompaniment than an interruption—a silence of which the dwellers in cities know nothing—with the scented tips of the pine-boughs in the plantations on either side swinging noiselessly to and fro, and the grass—green here in moist Cornwall even at the end of July—stretching away from his feet in soft descending undulations, until it met the blue purple of the sea—jewel-fretted under the morning sunlight—as his senses took in the loveliness surrounding him, a faint compunction seized upon him, a doubt as to whether, after all,

he had chosen the better part of life, whether his past record of disappointments was worth all he had spent on it. And, even as the doubt rose in his mind, he saw the yacht—John Penhala's yacht, with its young owner and Paul Petrovsky on board—slip into view round the green outline of Tregarron Head, and straightway the mind of the plotter was back among its familiar work again, and the touch of regret was done with and put away, as a thing that has no use.

The breeze was very light, and the yacht moved but languidly. Petrovsky lit one of his eternal cigarettes, and watched the beautiful little vessel glide slowly across the width of the Carn Ruth inlet, until it passed out of sight under the cliffs at the foot of the Penhala slope; then he strolled quietly down the incline until, at the distance of a mile from the house, he came to

the place where the slope grew suddenly steeper and descended abruptly to the sea-shore.

It was at this point that the Carn Ruth river threw itself into the sea ; making its way down the face of the slope, by a series of short leaps and deep pools, to the strand below ; and it was by the side of these falls that the steps leading direct from the Penhala park to the Penhala landing-stage had been cut. Not the best place that could have been chosen for them, perhaps ; for when the autumn and winter rains had swollen the little river to three times its summer height, and the water dashed over the rocky ledges with a force and volume that would have carried a horse's body, without pause or hindrance, from the uplands above to the ocean below, the spray from the dashing waters was apt to make the steps slippery. They were arranged

in short flights, certainly, but the spaces between the flights were still on the slope, and, given a slip on the topmost step, the chances were all in favour of a roll from top to bottom of the steep incline.

Looking at the pathway now, danger was the last thing it would have suggested. Here and there down the face of the cliff were little nooks or hollows, where the ferns and grasses grew breast-high, and where the Carn Ruth sweethearts were fond of sitting in the summer evenings, to watch the sun set over the mighty stretch of the Atlantic waters; while the path leading inland—through the plantations to the main drive—was a positive dream of beauty, because of the overhanging shadows of the pines, mirrored in the stillness of the deeper pools, the flashing lights that were caught and tossed skywards again from the rapids between, and the

luxuriance of the undergrowth, which was allowed to follow its own sweet will unchecked by the hand of man.

As Petrovsky waited there, where the path and the river emerged in company from the shadow of the pines, and went on their way in company over the edge of the slope to the sea, the romance of his surroundings struck him yet once again. It was an ideal spot for lovers' meetings. He could imagine the youthful couple standing a little way back on the edge of the large black pool, which lay so treacherously still in the shadow of the pines, scarcely a dozen yards distant from the first leap down the face of the rock, while they exchanged their poor little vows of eternal constancy. Yes, it was quite an ideal place for lovers' meetings; for, if she proved unkind, was there not the steep slope close at hand, from which he could

leap straight from the cruel one's presence into eternity?

As the sound of voices rose from the face of the cliff beneath his feet, warning the waiting man of the approach of those he had come to meet, he smiled cynically, and muttered a mental jibe at his own folly. Twice in half-an-hour he had been guilty of a touch of sentiment. What did such an unusual thing portend, he wondered?

With a careless shrug of his shoulders he turned again to the downward path, as two faces came into view, mounting from the steps below; one a small reproduction of his own, all but the beard—flaxen-haired, sallow-skinned, square-jawed, full-lipped, with eyes deep-set and of a dark-blue colour; the other less remarkable, but more agreeable. A good, well-tanned, English skin, chestnut hair, well-opened

brown eyes, a suggestion of fair hair on the upper lip, a mouth which looked at its best when smiling, and a chin which one would expect to find under such a mouth—massive chins and flexible lips are not often found in one another's company.

The mobile lips flashed into a ready smile now, as their owner glanced upward, and saw the Russian waiting at the top of the steps. The boy at his side did not smile, but his eyes deepened and flushed under their overhanging brows till his whole face was alight with feeling, and he sprang up the few remaining steps almost at a bound, in his eagerness to clasp his father's outstretched hand.

Petrovsky stooped and kissed his forehead, and giving his left hand into his ardent young clasp, held out his right to the more leisurely climber.

‘ You must not estimate him as a baby, John, because he is so glad to see his father again,’ he said, half-apologetically. ‘ We have not often been separated for two days and nights, have we, Paul ?’

‘ Oh, there’s not much of the baby about him,’ declared John, heartily. ‘ Already he’s as good a yachtsman as I. We have arranged that he is to be my sailing-master, as soon as he has finished with Rugby.’

‘ Only when you don’t want me, father,’ put in the boy, hastily ; and a faint colour flashed into his face, and he drew an inch or two nearer his father’s side, as if to assure him that he was still first in his heart and mind. ‘ It is grand being out in the yacht, but I don’t want to be there if you want me to be anywhere else.’

Petrovsky laughed gently as he turned by John’s side for the homeward walk.

‘Cousin John will hardly thank you for such a bargain as that,’ he said. ‘Perhaps it would be wiser to defer the contract until we see what the next few years have in store for us all.’ His tone changed a little as he continued, ‘Your father was disappointed that you were not back in time for the cottagers’ flower-show yesterday, John. I suppose you were becalmed a long way out?’

‘A pretty good distance,’ John answered, carelessly. ‘It would have been a good long pull for the men in the heat; and Paul and I were so pleasantly occupied that we did not care to break up our afternoon.’

‘I have learnt three tricks, father,’ put in Paul, eagerly; ‘how to swallow an egg whole and fetch it out from the top of my head, how to bring a live bird in a cage from the crown of a hat, and how to pro-

duce any card you ask for from the pack. John is going to show me some more by-and-bye. He says——’

‘Chut!’ said Petrovsky. ‘He will make you as enthusiastic over his drawing-room magic as he is himself. It is a pity you were not here yesterday, John, to give a display of your skill to the wit and fashion of Carn Ruth. And that reminds me,’ he added, and turning suddenly to Paul, he sent him forward on some trifling excuse, and bade him wait for them at the terrace-door.

‘That is not the only reason why it was a pity you were not here yesterday,’ he continued, when the boy was beyond ear-shot. ‘Do you know why I came down to meet you this morning, John?’

John’s ready smile came at the question. He was a little inclined in his heart to make fun of his uncle, to call him a nine-

teenth century Guy Fawkes, and to poke sly jokes at his bombs, and mines, and plottings, and conspiracies. He was smiling now at the touch of mystery in his manner, and saying to himself that the man was such a born conspirator, that he could not discuss the most everyday affair without making a secret of it. But he was a Penhala guest, and a guest, too, not in the most flourishing circumstances, and John was too courteous to chaff him as he would have liked.

‘Had it anything to do with Paul?’ he asked. ‘Did our long absence make you anxious? Perhaps you came down to see for yourself that the little chap was all safe and sound.’

He was still smiling as he made the suggestion, a pleasant, sympathetic smile it was, and meant to show that he could

quite understand the father's anxiety under the circumstances.

‘No,’ said Petrovsky, slowly; ‘Paul was scarcely in my mind: it was you I was thinking of, not Paul. I came to meet you because I wanted to say a word or two to you in private, without the fear of being overheard. Especially I wanted to avoid any chance of your father overhearing what I am going to say.’

John, with his hands in the pockets of his loose blue serge trousers, and his peaked yachting-cap pushed rakishly to the back of his head, turned a glance of enquiry on his companion. Had he really anything important to say, or was it only that his inveterate habit of mystification would not be shaken off?

Petrovsky answered the look with one of shrewd intelligence.

‘People were busy with your affairs in your absence yesterday,’ he said. ‘Who is this Hagar Polwhele, whose name is being mixed up so freely with yours?’

The blood flashed up to John’s hair-roots. Just for an instant he tried to laugh the attack off as not worth attention; but Petrovsky’s investigating glance was on him, and he knew that flush had betrayed him, and so, instead of laughing the thing down, he fell into a passion.

‘Whose slanderous tongue is at work now?’ he cried. ‘Is it that Morris Edyvean again? I’ll make the bullying brute pay for it if it is. I told him last time that I wouldn’t put up quietly with any more of his interference. Because he’s the biggest man in the parish, he thinks he can dictate to the lot of us; but knocking a man down isn’t the only way of

wiping out a grudge, as I'll soon prove to him if he doesn't leave me and my affairs alone.'

With the rapid insight born of his past training, Petrovsky pieced this defiance on to the hint dropped by Lady Penruddach, and drew his own inferences.

'Then Miss Hagar has two strings to her bow,' he said, quietly; 'and this Edyvean is the other; and there is a little ill-blood between you; and there was some truth after all in the little story I heard the birds whispering to one another.'

John said nothing. His little flash in the pan was over, and he was wishing he had held his tongue. Petrovsky looked up the slope at the house, where Paul stood leaning on the terrace balustrade waiting for them. It was not yet six o'clock, and the little lad was the only

sign of life to be seen along the wide low front of the sleeping house.

‘I wish we knew a little more of each other,’ he went on, letting his voice fall to a more confidential key, though indeed there was no possibility of their being overheard; ‘as man to man I should like to speak candidly to you—but we are such strangers——’

‘All right!’ said John, as he paused.

John was feeling savage, but he did not feel justified in sulking with Petrovsky; perhaps the subtle touch of flattery in the phrase, ‘as man to man,’ addressed by a man of Petrovsky’s age to one of his own, may have also influenced him.

‘All right! Fire away! We’ll take the intimacy for granted. Say what you want to say.’

‘Well, then, it is this. Drop the Pol-
whele affair. Don’t risk its getting to your

father's ears. Leave her and the other fellow—what is it? Edyvean—to make a match of it——'

'I wish to God I could!' burst forth John, irrepressibly, and stopped dead, with Petrovsky's penetrating eyes on him.

'So bad as that?' he muttered.

John pulled his cap forward, as if the sunshine had grown suddenly too strong for his eyes, and stared moodily at the grass at his feet.

'It's as bad as it can be,' he said.

There was a short silence between them. The elder man's eyes left the gloomy young face for a moment to travel in a rapid comprehensive glance around him, at the house, the pasture lands, and the little town nestling at the foot of the brown cliffs on the other side of the inlet. All of it Penhala property, all of it some day to belong to this boy, unless——!

Another flash of his eye towards the solitary little figure, waiting so quietly on the terrace in the shadow of the house, and then——

‘What do you mean to do?’

‘There is only one thing to be done.’

‘You would marry her? Good heavens, John, you must not do that!’

‘What then?’ asked John, lifting his miserable young eyes from the ground.

‘Cut my throat? I don’t see any other way out of it. Perhaps you don’t know what a woman’s reproaches are like——’

‘Pish!’ said Petrovsky, refusing to waste argument on that part of the subject. ‘Look here! What if you could stop the reproaches, without sacrificing yourself?’

‘What if I could put Niagara into a thimble?’ came the hopeless reply.

Petrovsky put his hand on the other’s shoulder.

‘What would you say to the man who showed you how to do it?’

John did not answer, but a glimmer of hope shot into his glance.

The Russian threw another half furtive look towards the waiting figure on the terrace.

‘Come over under the trees,’ he said; ‘nobody will see us there; what I’m going to say can’t be said in a breath.’

John turned without demur, and followed him across the grass to the shadow of the pines, with an increased air of hopefulness in his face and whole bearing.

And an hour later when the gardeners came bustling about the lawns, anxious to remove all traces of yesterday’s disorder before the master came on the scene, Paul was still on the terrace, waiting patiently, as he had been bidden.

But for his impregnable faith in his

father, he might have believed himself forgotten; but he knew better than that. He had heard it said that 'Stanislaus Petrovsky never forgot,' and of his own knowledge he knew the saying was true. So he waited patiently, as one who waits with a purpose.

CHAPTER III.

THE WATERS WERE RACING DOWNHILL TO
THE SEA.

ON the day following their long interview in the plantation, John Penhala and Stanislaus Petrovsky travelled to London together. The decision on John's part was quite sudden, but there was nothing to object to in it.

Though Petrovsky had not spoken openly of the danger he was going into, there was an impression in Penhala's mind that his brother-in-law's anxiety to secure little

Paul's future, arose from his doubt concerning his own. On one occasion he had gone so far as to say the chances were all against his ever revisiting England, speaking in a quiet, unemotional manner which gave his words the impress of truth.

Under these circumstances, Penhala had been glad when John decided to go to town with his uncle, 'to see him off;' for, misguided though his efforts appeared to the Englishman's law-abiding understanding, he would not have neglected one of the smallest duties of hospitality towards a man who was so obviously 'down on his luck.'

So John and the Russian journeyed to London together, and when, two days later, pretty Hagar Polwhele also left Carn Ruth, on a visit to her mother's relatives in London, nobody thought of associating the two events, for Petrovsky's companionship

seemed to prohibit such a suggestion.

Later in the year people were not so reticent, but before then many things had happened. And, as far as the Penhalas were concerned, one of the most important of these was the imprisonment and execution of Petrovsky. He was caught red-handed, and he died as he had always wished to die—for the good of The Cause.

Paul was at Rugby when it happened, and Penhala went himself to break the news to the lad, hoping by his presence to soften the boy's feeling of desolation. But, by some unknown means, the news had already reached Paul before his arrival, and the kind-hearted Cornishman was considerably nonplussed by the youngster's unnatural bearing under the blow.

‘It was a good death to die,’ he said, standing up straight and steady before his astonished uncle, with a still, quiescent

glow in his deep-set eyes. 'If I could choose how to die, I would die that way too; but not yet. I will get to be well known first, as he was, and then my death will do good, as his will. When we die like that we make the people's hearts burn with the hope of revenge, and they count their own lives as straw, and it is worth dying for, to make them feel like that.'

Poor Lancelot Penhala looked at the boy in a ridiculous perplexity. Conventional condolences would be thrown away upon such a truculent young revolutionist as this. He made a few remarks to the effect that Paul would know better by and by, and that he was to look upon him as his father in future, and to consider Penhala's house his home. And having done his duty in this respect, he got himself out of the youngster's presence as quickly as he decently could.

In spite of its tragic nature, the absurd incongruity of the situation tickled his sense of humour. He had come to comfort this child in his grief for the loss of his father, and the child had tacitly rebuked him for believing he was such a fool as to grieve at all. It was Lance Penhala who was the babe, and Paul Petrovsky who was the philosophic man of the world. And Lance had made himself responsible for the up-bringing of this budding revolutionist! He began to understand something of the hen's distress, when the duckling she has hatched takes to the water. Revolution and its tricks and manners were not at all in Penhala's line. He comforted himself, however, with the reflection that Paul's enthusiasm would probably fade with time; time and disuse. Certainly it would receive little encouragement at Rugby; for if there was one place in the world more

than another where such high falutin' was likely to be knocked out of the boy, that one place was an English public school.

So Lancelot returned again to his big house on the Cornish upland, and tried to fill his life with his duties to his neighbours, noble and simple. But those autumn months hung heavily, for he was accustomed to John's company at this particular season, and this year John had chosen to absent himself more than usual from the neighbourhood of Carn Ruth.

It was in the nature of things that Lance Penhala, being the person most concerned in his son's absence, should be the last to hear a hint as to its cause. Folks in the town had been talking busily for weeks before a breath of the rumour reached his ears.

Hagar Polwhele was back in her mother's bar again, though the women declared it

was past their knowledge to understand how she had the face to show herself among the customers, in the place where she had been born and bred.

And Mrs. Polwhele, meeting the elliptic glances of some of them, tossed her head in a way that puzzled, even while it shocked them. On one occasion, when these meaning glances had been more than usually trying to bear, she lost her self-command for a moment, and, addressing nobody in particular, observed that she thought Carn Ruth folks might safely leave her to fight, ay, and to win, her daughter's battles without any of their interference; which remark naturally set the tongues wagging faster than ever.

And Morris Edyvean still came regularly every evening, and smoked his pipe quietly in the parlour of the 'Miner's Rest,' and saw and heard all there was to see

and hear; and said nothing. But there was a certain grimness settling on his face, which was something new in his mates' knowledge of him. Though he came so persistently among them, he showed so plainly his desire to be left alone, that there was no choice left to them in the matter; and it grew to be no uncommon thing for the young overseer—once the most popular man in the Cluth-hoe mine—to pass an entire evening smoking and drinking alone in his corner, without exchanging a sign of comrade-ship with his fellows, beyond a curt nod as they entered or left the room.

Since Hagar's visit to London at the end of July, he had finally given up singing in the choir, greatly to Mrs. Yarlstoke's regret; for the loss of his magnificent voice and his imposing figure created

a vacancy which she was likely to find some difficulty in filling.

And it was not until a few days before Christmas, that the first faint breath of this brooding mischief reached the ears of the lonely man in the big house on the hill. And even then, so delicately was the truth hinted at, that if he had not been peculiarly sensitive in all matters concerning his son, the chances are that he would have still remained in ignorance of what the speaker intended to convey. But the introduction of John's name into a discussion had at any time the effect of quickening his perceptions to an extraordinary degree, and so it was that the half word let drop in his presence had an effect the speaker scarcely anticipated.

It was at the weekly meeting of magistrates that this awakening came to him, and

his way home afterwards led him past the 'Miner's Rest.'

Hagar, with the sleeves of her loose red flannel blouse rolled up above her dimpled elbows, and with a large, white bibbed apron muffling her entire figure, was busily at work among the glassess and bottles on the shelves behind the bar, when Mr. Penhala pushed open the swing door leading from the street, and, coming down the two steps, crossed slowly to the counter. Hagar, facing the mirror, recognised the broad shoulders and handsome, clean-shaven features of her mother's landlord at a glance, and, with a stifled exclamation, caught with both hands at the edge of the shelf just above her head, to save herself from falling. Perhaps for ten seconds she hung there, insensible to everything but the terror of the thought that she must face round, sooner or later,

and supply the wants of this unwelcome customer.

The bar was empty but for themselves, and the silence in the quaint, gay little place was more pregnant with meaning than the most impressive speech. Indeed, when speech came, the height of the crisis was past. The consciousness of this came to Hagar instantly, with his first word. The studied unconcern of his tone told her that much—that he had not come to make his accusation. With a dry sob of relief she loosened her clutch on the shelf, and faced round to him.

‘Will you give me a glass of your best ale?’

Instinctively she performed her duty, caring for nothing only that he should not attack her openly, while he had her there, defenceless, at his mercy. As her hand closed round the pump-handle in

drawing his ale, she felt, rather than saw, his glance fix itself on a ring she wore on the third finger of her right hand. The terror of the knowledge went through her like a pang of physical pain; still she would not mind so long as he did not attack her to her face, while she was there alone with him. As she went towards him with his glass in her shaking hand, she felt to the innermost core of her being the full meaning of the comprehensive glance he threw over her, from the pretty rings of dark hair above her forehead, to the hem of the big, white, disfiguring apron. But, conscious as she was of her shame in his sight, even this emotion was pushed into the background by her overpowering relief at the every-day tone of his 'Thank you.'

She would probably have a sharp attack of hysterics when he was gone, but mean-

time she took his shilling, and passed his change back to him, and went and fetched her duster from the back of the bar, where she had left it, and made a show of dusting the pump handles, heedless of her own death-like pallor, heedless of her shaking hands, caring for nothing, except that this courteous, observant gentleman, should take himself off without saying what she had, at the beginning, feared he had come to say.

Poor, frivolous little Hagar, caring for nothing but the joy or pain of the present moment! Poor, feeble little ephemera! It were well that you should not outlast the trembling joy and triumph that is hid away in your heart just now, for all its quaking at this alarming encounter, that you should not see the going down of the sun on the day of your transient exaltation.

When Lancelot Penhala found himself in the light of day again, he groaned aloud. He was not conscious of it himself, but a wee child passing looked up at him, with so much sympathetic surprise in her small face, that he guessed he must be making himself conspicuous in some way. Pulling himself up sharply, he set a guard on himself, and gained the shelter of his own house without arousing further curiosity.

Both the boys were due home that day—John between two and three, Paul not until nine. John had hinted at a desire to spend Christmas in town, but his father had put pressure on him to induce him to come home for the festive season. He was doubly glad now that he had.

Luncheon, usually at two o'clock sharp, had been put off till the young master's arrival, and Penhala, instead of meeting

him in the hall, according to invariable custom, awaited his coming in the library ; a well-used room in that house, for the master was a real lover of books.

John knew part of the truth before he got to his father's presence. He read it in the butler's troubled face, as he stood at the top of the steps in the great porch, holding the house door wide for him, and saw corroboration in the man's anxious manner, as he told him the master was waiting in the library for him.

John's step was lighter than his heart as he ran down the length of the big hall and round a side passage to the library door.

How he managed out of the difficulty, even for the time being, heaven, or the other power, alone knows. His lies must have rained like hail. He certainly did succeed in staving off his father's wrath at the moment, though he must have known

such weakness could only add to the trouble in the future.

‘Very well,’ said Penhala, at the close of the interview, ‘I accept your explanation upon one condition—that the girl returns your mother’s ring to you to-night. If you have had no hand in the mischief that is brewing there, if you handed the ring to her in a moment of folly, because she wanted to see how a diamond ring looked on her finger, if there is nothing more in it than that, there can be no real difficulty in making her return it. Come to me this evening with the ring in your possession, and I will try to believe what you tell me. Let us drop the whole thing now, if you please. It sickens me. I hope to God you may never again make me feel as I felt when I saw that child wearing your mother’s ring this morning. I’m not sure that my affection

for you would stand many such wrenches —not at all sure.'

Morris Edyvean arrived at the 'Miner's Rest' earlier than usual that evening. It still wanted a quarter of six when he came into the bar, kicking his boots free of trodden snow at the door; for the weather had broken since sunset, and there was every promise of a real, seasonable Christmas of the good, old-fashioned type.

When he had rid his boots and coat of snow, Edyvean made his way as usual to Mrs. Polwhele's end of the bar—Hagar and he never showed consciousness of each other's presence in these days—and asked for his usual dose of whisky. He stood there for a minute or so talking to Mrs. Polwhele, with his shoulder towards Hagar, persuading himself pitifully that nobody saw his hungry eyes watching the girl's reflection in the mirror facing him. It

was the only sight he ever got of her now—these stolen glances in the looking-glass behind her mother's bar—but, even so, he saw that of her which he would gladly have given his two hands not to see; that which made him set his teeth close on the stem of his short pipe, and register many a vow of vengeance against some unnamed person, in the fulness of time. He was only holding off till events justified his suspicions, and then—— He could afford to wait, he declared doggedly; there was nothing else left to him now but to wait. Ay, to wait till his chance came, and then to take it—to take it to the full, and let the Afterwards care for itself.

While he stood there, exchanging original remarks with his hostess on the seasonableness of this sudden fall of snow, keeping meantime his furtive watch on the mirror behind her, he saw one of the

stable-lads from Penhala's house come up to the counter, and pass a note across to Hagar. As she turned a little aside to read the line or two of the enclosure, he watched the face of his whilom sweetheart carefully, lifting his glass, and sipping slowly at his grog meanwhile.

Was it anger or gladness that brought the quick warm blood flashing up into her face as she read, till she looked for the moment like the bright, thoughtless Hagar of a year ago?

The flush was still there when she slipped the letter into her pocket, and watching her opportunity, when her mother was unoccupied for a moment, called her to the back of the bar, and evidently communicated the contents of the note.

Edyvean, with his glance openly on the mirror now, for there was no longer anybody at leisure to observe him, made out

that Mrs. Polwhele was first indignant and then furious at what Hagar was saying to her ; that she argued and remonstrated with all her might against some proposition of her daughter's, and that it ended in Hagar's open defiance of her mother's authority. The final words of the argument were spoken loud enough for everybody in the bar to hear.

‘ Go your own wilful way then ; only, if harm comes of it, don't come to me to set it right, for I'll have nither pairt nor passel in the mucky mess, and so I tell ee.’

It was only when under the influence of strong emotion, that Mrs. Polwhele allowed herself to slip into the use of the Cornish vernacular.

Hagar scarcely waited to hear the finish of her mother's ultimatum ; she swung round and passed hastily out of the bar,

throwing an upward glance at the clock as she went, as if to remind herself that she had no time to waste.

As Mrs. Polwhele turned to resume her duties to her customers, Edyvean picked up his glass and moved away from the counter to his usual corner, on the other side of the bar. Setting his glass on the window-ledge, he reached up in his usual manner to relight his pipe at the bracket over his head—scarcely a ‘reach up’ for him because of his enormous height.

But when his pipe was fairly under way he did not seat himself immediately; he stood there until Mrs. Polwhele was thoroughly occupied again, and then he moved over to the door, and stood an instant or two reading an account of a forthcoming Christmas feast, that was hanging against the wall there; and the next time the door swung open to admit a customer, he

caught it, and passed out before he let it fall-to again. It was almost as if he wished to get away without drawing especial attention to the exact moment of his exit.

Once outside and beyond the glare of the tavern windows, he paused a moment to turn up the collar of his pilot coat—for the snow was coming down in earnest now, and the sensation of melted snow trickling down inside one's coat collar is something of a trial, to the most philosophic man alive.

Standing there in the shadow, Edyvean glanced up and down and across the street, as if looking out for some particular object, but as he crossed over to the other side of the road, there was a dissatisfied dawdle in his way of moving which showed he had not found what he was looking for. Here he waited, pressed well back against the

projecting corner of one of the irregularly built houses, until he saw Hagar, well muffled up and carrying a lantern, come out of the house opposite, and start off at a smart walk up the hill, in the direction of Penhala's house.

Then he drew a deep, big breath, and treading cautiously, though indeed the snow underfoot was already thick enough to deaden his footsteps, he stole after the little figure ahead.

Creeping along in that stealthy manner, with bent back and shoulders hunched up to his ears, his huge form looking larger than ever against the background of universal whiteness surrounding him, his outlines blurred and indistinct as they loomed through the fast falling snow, there was something almost suggestive of the supernatural in his whole *entourage*; or there would have been had anybody been there

to receive the suggestion. But they had the road quite to themselves, those two figures, the robust and the fragile, the one a patch of light ahead, the other a mass of shadow in the rear, and they passed, unnoticed by the eye of man, up the hill, in at the gates, and about a third of the way up the drive that led from the east lodge to the main front of Penhala's house.

Here the road crossed, by means of a handsome little stone bridge, the Carn Ruth river, and it was on the far bank of this river that the pathway leading to the cliff and the Penhala landing-stage lay.

Hagar paused on the bridge and lifted her lantern above her head, and whistled shrilly, and waited, listening. But only the sighing of the pines, and the hoarse sullen roar of the sea beating against the foot of the cliffs, and the swift hurrying

rush of the river under her feet, answered her.

In front of her the drive stretched away round a bold curve to the house, sheltered on either side by the wide-reaching plantations ; which had been mapped out sixty years ago by old Joshua Penhala, to shield his new house from the biting blasts from the east. Running away from her on her left, in a direct line for the sea, was the river, bordered on either side by these same pines until it neared the brink of the cliff, and took its final eager leap into the open ocean.

Because of the continuous curve of the drive neither the house nor the lodge could be seen from the bridge where Hagar waited. Only the road itself lay white and smooth for a short distance before and behind her, until it passed out of sight round the crowded boles of the pines. The

plantations themselves were as yet free of snow underfoot, for there was no wind, and the snow lay still where it had fallen, on the interlacing branches of the trees above.

It was very dreary there alone, with never a sign of human-kind in sight—for the man's figure in the rear, keeping well beyond the radius of light from the lifted lantern, was invisible among the tree-trunks—and the waiting girl, looking keenly about her, up and down the curve of the white road, and in and out and about among the blackness of the pines, grew suddenly conscious of her utter loneliness, and a horrible shudder seized her and shook her from head to foot. She whistled again and the sudden fear at her heart was discernible in the quavering weakness of her whistle.

But her alarm was over for the present,

for at that second whistle a tall, lissom youth, in gaiters and jacket, came leaping through the shadow to her side, pouring forth an eager string of apologies and regrets as he came.

‘What an awful night to bring her out into! When his note was written, there was no sign of this beastly break in the weather. Had there been he would have come down to her, instead of bringing her up to him. But he wanted so much to have a long talk with her without fear of interruption; and it was so sweet of her to come in spite of the snow.’

Still holding forth with affectionate solicitude, he drew her in under the trees out of the storm, and relieved her of the lantern, and taking off his cloth cap, used it to flick the snow from her shoulders and bosom. And then he turned with his arm round her, and led her along the trodden

path, by the brink of the brawling river.

And the figure on the other bank kept pace with them, moving along in the shadow, gliding from tree to tree, never far from them, but, because of the noisy rapids between, never actually within ear-shot.

They had gone perhaps half the distance along the path leading from the drive to the edge of the cliff when they stopped, and the lantern was set on a crag overhanging the rushing stream, from whence it threw its light downwards on the swirling, hissing waters beneath. From here could be heard the sound of each separate billow as it broke against the cliffs below. There had been a spell of westerly gales lately, until to-day, and now, at high tide, as the towering breakers came rushing landwards, flinging themselves furiously against the first obstacle they had encountered since

their birth in mid-ocean, the influence of those blustering days was making itself felt from end to end of that exposed Cornish coast, so that the very earth seemed to vibrate with the accumulated force of the billows' thunderous blows.

‘It's a rough night at sea,’ said Hagar, still with some sign of disquiet in her face. It was as if the sudden scare that had fallen upon her up at the bridge ten minutes ago, had left its mark behind it in the dilation of her eyes, and the quickened rise and fall of her bosom. ‘I'm glad there's no one near or dear to me on the water to-night, John.’

John did not answer immediately. He stood with his hands tucked in the belt of his shooting-jacket, staring moodily at the streaks of light flashing in and out, out and in, among the hurrying rapids at his

feet. And then, gathering himself together with a burst of desperation, he set his back towards the lantern against the rock, and faced his difficulty.

‘Why have you not told me about the visit my father paid you this morning, Hagar?’

She left off listening to the thunder of the billows—it was curious what a fascination they had for her to-night—and turned to him with a touch of self-assertion in her manner.

‘I think I might put the same question to you, John. I was waiting for you to introduce the subject.’

He waived the childish quibble aside with a touch of impatience.

‘How did he behave to you?’

‘Just as Mr. Penhala might be expected to behave to Hagar Polwhele. Just that, and nothing more.’

‘And yet he has heard—something, Hagar.’

‘I guessed that the instant I saw his face at the open door. What else would have brought him to the “Miner’s Rest” for a glass of ale?’

‘It has put me in a devil of a fix—his springing a mine on me in this way. I had an awful scene with him when I got home this afternoon.’

‘And you had to tell him everything?’ asked Hagar, a sudden eager expectancy leaping into the glance she gave him. ‘Does your father know that I’m his daughter-in-law, John?’

She could not see the expression on his face, but he struck at the ground with his heel with a vicious petulance, which was as good as a sight of his eyes.

‘You didn’t,’ she said. ‘You broke your promise. You gave me your word

that, if anybody accused me to your father, you would clear my name. And you've not done it.'

There were warnings of tears in her voice, and he put his hand quickly on her shoulder with a comforting gesture.

'Come now, Hagar, what is the use of going over all that ground again? I give you my word that my father does not think so badly of you as you imagine. Your main backsliding in his sight is that you serve the Cluth-hoe miners with pints of ale with my mother's ring on your finger.'

She drew off her woollen glove as he spoke and looked admiringly at the handsome ring. She even held her hand up so that the stones should catch the light from the lantern; and the watcher, behind a tree on the other side of the stream, gnashed his teeth in silent frenzy

as he caught the flash of the brilliants, and saw the passionate admiration in the girl's face.

‘I saw him look at it,’ she said. ‘I was half-afraid he would ask me to give it up.’

‘That is just what he wants,’ struck in John, snatching eagerly at the opening. ‘He wants you to give up the ring.’

She closed her hand sharply, and put it out of sight under her cloak.

‘You’re not going to ask me to do it, are you? You told me I should wear it until I was able to wear my wedding-ring openly; you’re not going back on your word, are you?’

He laughed drearily as she hid her hand.

‘You don’t suppose I’m going to take it from you by force! If you won’t give it up willingly, you must keep it. But I

warn you, if I don't show that ring to my father to-night, it will mean ruin for us both.'

'Ruin?' she echoed. 'How, John?' She had never seen her gay, adoring young husband in this mood until now, and she was startled by it. 'I don't want to do you any harm,' she went on; 'and, after all, whether the ring is on my finger or not, it don't make any real difference, does it?'

She drew her hand from under her cloak and began to finger the ring caressingly. And he, seeing that she was going to yield, was overcome by a sudden spasm of shame, so violent and overwhelming, that he spoke out the very thought that was in his heart, without any heed for the consequences.

'Wait a minute, Hagar!' he cried, with a gesture of passionate repudiation. 'I can't cheat you out of the ring under false

pretences—I've been a blackguard to you—I can't take the ring from you till you know, my dear. I've been a mean, cowardly cur, but, as there's a God above us, I'll make reparation !'

'Reparation?' she repeated, and stood transfixed ; her hands, in the act of drawing off the ring, raised in front of her, her lips parted, her horrified, questioning eyes searching his face for denial of the sudden, awful terror at her heart.

'You wonder what I mean by "reparation,"' he went on, hurrying over his shameful confession, and forgetting, in his own misery, to break his news gently to the poor child before him. 'You are thinking that there is no need of such a thing between you and me. But there is, my darling ; bitter need of it ! I have done you an awful wrong, Hagar—the ceremony we went through in London last

July was no marriage in reality—it was a sham affair, got up for me by an obliging friend——’

He stopped, for such a cry came from between her blanched lips as struck him into silence. She lifted her hands, one on either side of her head, and stood so, swaying heavily, with her wide, stricken eyes reading the self-abasement of his face. It was as if she wanted to assure herself of the truth of what she had heard, and that done, she turned without a sound, as if to fly from him.

‘Hagar!’ he cried, heart-broken at her shrinking. ‘Hagar!’ And he put out a quick hand to detain her.

But with a face of loathing, she sprang away from his touch, sprang, in her eagerness to get beyond his reach, so far backwards, that her feet came down on the oozy slope of the river bank, and, without

a cry, she slid noiselessly into the rushing rapids at his feet.

The action was so instantaneous, that, left there alone, he stood a moment as if stricken into stone, rigid and helpless with the sudden horror of it; but the next instant his senses and the use of his limbs came back to him, and with a despairing cry of 'Hagar! Hagar! My love! my love!' he dashed along the path towards the brink of the cliff.

And on the other bank, unseen by him, there was also a figure flying for dear life in the same direction.

But the waters were racing downhill to the sea, and the night was dark as Erebus.

CHAPTER IV.

HE PUSHED HER IN—I SAW IT DONE—I SAW
IT DONE, I'LL SWEAR IT!

IF he had given himself time to reason, John Penhala would have known how utterly futile was that straining, tearing rush along the river bank.

At this point of the stream it was dangerous work for a man to attempt wading, going into it steadily with a wading pole, how then could a girl, slipping in unawares, without foothold or warning, be expected to stand against the rushing waters?

But one does not reason at such

moments. It was mere instinct that prompted that mad, blind dash down the stream through the darkness. Passing thus suddenly out of the light of the lantern, he could see absolutely nothing, and an occasional snow-flake drifting into his eyes through an opening overhead, did not serve to make his eyesight clearer.

It was wonderful that he kept his footing as long as he did, wonderful that he was not tripped up in his first dozen steps, instead of keeping his feet till he was out of the plantation and on the smooth grass land, where the snow showed white through the gloom against the blackness of the river. It was here, as he neared the first short flight of steps leading down the face of the cliff, that he lost his foot-hold, and fell into space.

He threw out his hands as he went, crashing, bounding, flying downwards, but

they caught at nothing; and he knew he was going head-long down to the sea. Then came another crash, with a sound in his ears like the blow of the blacksmith's hammer on the anvil, and a flash like the blacksmith's forge before his eyes, and then silence.

The first thing he was sensible of, when the physical agony of a return to consciousness was over, was the roar of the surf in his ears. Awfully near it was, but the fact of its nearness conveyed no terror to his mind; his understanding was not yet alert enough for that. The next thing he knew was that sundry hard points were penetrating the skin of his face, and causing him considerable inconvenience. He lifted a languid hand, and found he was lying face downwards among the trailing branches of a bramble bush. With something of an effort he rolled over on his

back, and stared straight up above him.

There was a moon somewhere ; she was not visible, but over-head the heaped-up hurrying clouds were white with her light ; and here and there, where the edges of the moving masses did not overlap each other, an occasional flash of starlight struck momentarily on his sight. Then the bramble branches above him moved slightly, and a little mass of dislodged snow fell on his face.

His reason asserting itself little by little, he began now to wonder how it had come about that he was out there, asleep, on this bitter night—began to ask of himself what the circumstances were which had led to this extraordinary state of things. His brain did not respond immediately to this demand upon it. For a few seconds he lay there asking the question, but unable to answer it. And then, in one blinding,

vivid, flash of memory, the whole string of events leading up to his fall flashed complete into his mind, in one instant of time his brain shook off its puzzled bewilderment, and he passed from a state of idle enquiry to one of the most perfect, the clearest, the most appalling recollection.

He saw the whole scene again, down to the minutest detail: the girl's figure facing him, with the light of the lantern reflected in her pretty dark eyes, as they gazed at him wide with horror, the flashing colours in the diamonds on her uplifted hand, the duller flashes from the rushing waters at her feet, the dim mystery of the background of crowding pine boles behind her—not a feature of the picture was missing from his memory. Again he heard her quick little cry of anguish as she realised the full extent of his crime against her,

again he saw the swift turn from him, his quick step forward, her backward spring, her noiseless slip down the bank, and the sudden emptiness of the picture. Once more he saw himself standing there, mazed and helpless in that awful solitude, once more saw himself tearing along the river path in the darkness, once more felt himself trip and fall, flying through space, downwards to the sea, and felt the stunning blow on his head, which had stopped his descent some way down. He even remembered hearing the ringing sound his head made in contact with the edge of the steps. That was what had knocked him senseless.

And he had lain there how long?

He had no means of knowing, but some time must have passed since his fall; the snow-flakes were driving in his face as he

dashed along the river bank, now the night was fair.

The knowledge that, in any case, he had lain there senseless long enough to shut out the faintest possibility of rescue for Hagar, came upon him with a new shock of misery.

She was dead—poor, pretty Hagar Polwhele was dead! His mind, never entirely free from self-condemnation since he had allowed himself to be talked into the expedient of a sham marriage, was now one vast expanse of agonised remorse. The wrong done to the living girl seemed a thousand times intensified, now that it had become a wrong against the dead. If he had but done her justice, the horror of her death would have pressed less intolerably upon him.

He turned his face to the ground again,

unconscious of the acute discomfort of his surroundings, and lay there, with his head clasped in his hands, moaning in a mental anguish which could not be endured in silence.

For some time his moans were the only sounds that broke the monotony of the shrill swish of the cascades at his side, and the hoarse roar of the surf a hundred feet below him.

When his head had struck against the step, he had bounded off into one of the sheltered, fern-filled recesses which abutted on the pathway, one of those well protected nooks which the wind blew over but did not penetrate, and where last summer's growth of ferns still stood, green and waist-high, behind the tufts of tough, feathery tamarisk that waved on the edge of the ledge.

No snow had made its way into this sheltered cavity, beyond one or two droppings from the vegetation on the face of the cliff above, and it is possible that John Penhala would have spent the night there, alone with his misery, but for what happened afterwards.

Lying there, face downwards, almost invisible in the diffuse light of the cloud-veiled moon, because of the luxuriant growth surrounding him, he presently grew conscious of a new sound, breaking intermittently through the thunders of the breakers—the sound of a human voice. Now and again, in the pauses between the mighty moan of one retreating wave, and the thunderous advance of the next, he could hear the voice quite plainly. And even when the deafening crash of the billow against the rock overwhelmed it for a time, it rose again the next moment, tri-

umphant over the hoarse roar of the defeated torrent—vehement, powerful, and full of menace.

John Penhala lifted his head and listened.

The voice was coming nearer, growing more continuous. He could distinguish now the rise and fall in the tones, as they came hurtling through the pandemonium of the rushing waters ; and now he caught a word or two ; and, as he heard, he drew himself instinctively closer, under the overarching growth, and held his very breath for terror. For he had heard his own name mixed up with the torrent of curses that were being shouted forth to the night, and in an instant—although till now his thoughts had never glanced in the direction of possible peril for himself—his instinct of self-preservation was on the alert, his whole being vibrating with a

new-born apprehension, his every faculty responding instantaneously to the call on his self-defence.

It was the voice of Morris Edyvean that was flinging forth its curses on the tempestuous solitude of the night, it was the tread of Morris Edyvean—a furious, vehement tread, in exact keeping with the passionate incoherence of his ravings—that was crushing its way upwards through the brambles and bushes on the other side of the dashing watercourse, it was the form of Morris Edyvean that passed between the watcher's strained gaze and the whiteness of the cliff face beyond, with its brawny arms tossing heavenward, and its quivering fingers extended towards the hurrying clouds and the calm unconcern of the distant stars.

‘Long ago, John Penhala, I swore to my Maker, with a binding oath, that if

harm came to Hagar through you, you should answer for it to me—now you shall answer for it to a mightier than me! To one whose grip, once on its prey, doesn't loosen till it's reaped its full penalty. The law shall deal with you, you sly, soft-tongued devil, and we'll see what service your smooth tongue and your silken manners will do you when it's a judge and jury you've got to stand up to, instead of a foolish, trusting slip of a girl. Curse you! . . . Much good your leering looks and your soft way of speaking will do you then, you . . . I will see to that, lad. If one man's swearing can hang another, as surely as I'm a man born of woman, you shall hang for this night's work. Hang by the neck until you are dead, and may God not have mercy on your soul! Do you think Hagar Polwhele's death shall go unpunished? I've got you in my clutch at

last, and, by the eternal God, I'll not loosen it till I've squeezed the last breath of life out of your fair, leprous carcase, you Sink of Iniquity, you Whited Sepulchre !'

And as he mounted higher and higher, and, reaching the brink of the cliff above, passed at once out of sight and hearing, the man below raised himself slowly and cautiously from his recumbent position, stretching his stiffened limbs, pushing his fair hair back from his throbbing temples, and looking about him, from side to side, above and below, as if wondering in which direction his best chance of safety lay—by the path to the upland above, or by a step over the edge to the foaming billows below.

Mrs. Polwhele's desire to keep Hagar at home that evening had been prompted entirely by considerations for the girl's

health. As for being left alone to attend to her customers, that was a matter which did not trouble her at all. In her younger days, in a busy London tavern in the heart of the city, she had often had twice as many people at one time on her hands as she was ever likely to have in her own bar at the 'Miner's Rest.' This busy, buxom, bright-eyed mother of Hagar's was a thoroughly capable woman of business; she found no difficulty in keeping the wants of her dozen or so of customers—miners and fishermen, for the most part—supplied as fast as they arose, finding time every now and again, in the midst of her duties, to throw a quick upward glance at the clock over the mirror at the back of the bar.

As the time drew on towards half-past seven, these glances grew more frequent and anxious; so much so that the quick-

witted Cornish folk saw and understood all about 'them trubbled gleeazings at clock faace,' without a word on the subject from their hostess.

One or two of the elder men, talking among themselves in a far corner, had almost decided to offer their services—'if so be as she'd like waun or two to taake a look up and down the rooads for signs of the missing wench,' when the door was flung open violently from the outside, and Morris Edyvean, white as death, panting and wild-eyed, strode into the brightly-lit little place.

The crash of the door, as it swung to again behind him, brought all eyes that way to where he stood ; and, as the glances fell upon him, the cheerful chatter changed at a breath to a dead silence of intense expectancy, while those nearest him fell

back a space, as if his near neighbourhood were a terror in itself.

Left thus isolated in their midst, he threw his big shoulders back, and swept the circle of horror-stricken faces at a glance.

‘Is’t writ on ma very faace, thin?’ he cried, the Cornish coming thick and strong in the presence of his every-day familiars.

And now that they heard his voice, shrill and quivering with an unknown horror, the terror of the breathless silence seemed as nothing to the terror of hearing him.

‘Ef a man sees murder done, does the cruelty of et set et’s maark on hes faace, so et can be knawn without a word on hes pairt?’

Nobody made a sound. One or two formed the word ‘Murder!’ with their

whitened lips, but his whole appearance and bearing were so awesome, his colourless face, the burning hate of his ever-moving glance, the rock-like rigidity of his attitude, drawn up to his full height, with his clenched hands hanging downwards, and his breath coming in quick, audible puffs, were so terrible to look upon, that his listeners lost their power of speech, and could only gaze and wait, in a fear too great for words, for what was to come next.

‘Ay, murder!’ he went on, catching that silent movement of their lips. ‘Murder, I tell ee—the basest, bloodiest murder ever committed by the hand of man! Yes, I ses et—Morris Edyvean. If any of ee ses I lie, lev un say et now.’

His glance flashed round the circle of faces—set hard like stone masks—as he flung forth his challenge. But there came

no answering word, and again he went on—

‘He pushed her in—I seed un—I’ll swear to et! He shall sweng ef my word can hang un, that shall he! He pushed her in, I saay! The waaters were between us, rushin’ and roarin’ like a hunderd devils lev loose, or he wud ha gone in behind her. He pushed her in and run—God, how he run! If I’d waunce got howld on him, I’d ha’ throttled un, cum-raades—ay, that wud I! But hes time wull come. My word wull hang un, and I’ll spaik it, aw that wull I, befowr any judge in the land! He pushed her in, I tell ee! And the waaters swurled her awaay, ovver the cleff, and down the faals to the murderous rocks and the roarin’ sea; an’ what wull they leave of her ’atween ’em, think ee? I tell ee, cum-raades, he pushed her in, John Penhala

himself—he ded, he ded ! Hagar, Hagar !’

Higher and higher his voice rose with each denunciation, until, reaching a climax of frenzied hate, it dropped suddenly, at the utterance of the girl’s name, to a hoarse guttural whisper, and, swinging round on his heel, he lunged forward, writhing in the convulsions of epilepsy.

One of the Penhala servants, driving through the high-street a few minutes afterwards, on his way to the railway-station, to meet Paul Petrovsky, was stopped as he passed the ‘Miner’s Rest,’ and heard the story that was flying through the town. Edyvean’s story, with an addition from Mrs. Polwhele, to the effect that it was a letter from John Penhala that had enticed Hagar out that evening. The man went back at once as far as the steward’s house, half-way up the hill, and repeated what he had heard. And the

steward, Eli Tregea, being a man of sound common-sense, called for his boots, and with a horrible sinking at his heart, tramped off to the house to interview Mr. John.

Going in quietly by the entrance that led to the offices, he came upon Mr. John's own man waiting inside the door, with a worried look on his usually impassive face.

'You're the very man I wanted to see, Crawford,' he said. 'Can you make some excuse to get Mr. John away from the dinner-table? I must speak to him at once!'

'He's not in, Mr. Tregea,' returned Crawford. 'There's the master waiting dinner this half-hour past, and the cook in the devil's own temper. I thought it was him when I heard you at the door.'

‘Do you know where he has gone?’

‘He told me he should be in to dress at seven,’ said Crawford, unconscious, apparently, that this observation was not an answer to the steward’s question. ‘“I shall be in a deuce of a hurry Crawford,” he said to me, when he went out; “I can’t get back before seven, and I don’t want to keep my father waiting dinner for me the first night I’m home. Get everything ready for me to slip into, there’s a good fellow, and then come down and wait for me at the office-door.” And here I’ve been more than an hour, Mr. Tregea, listening to the cook’s refined observations on the virtue of punctuality, and what to be at I’m blest if I know.’

Tregea stood thinking. He knew no more what to be at than Crawford himself. He did know that for a certainty Edyvean’s ghastly story would be up here

presently, and he wanted to soften the blow a little for Mr. Penhala if he possibly could. But he was utterly at a loss how to set about it. And even as he stood there considering, he heard voices in the courtyard outside, and instinctively put up his hand for silence.

‘If so be as we can awnly get the lad out o’ the way, and braake the noos a bit gentle lek to the squire afowr she comms, it ’ull be something. He’s that proud o’ that boy it met go fur to braake his haart ef she plumps her accoosation down on ee all at wance.’

‘It’s old Peter Carlyon,’ said Tregear. ‘Show him into the office, Crawford, and tell him the master will come to him in a minute.’ And, urged forward by the necessity for immediate action, he strode away to the front of the house, meaning to send his name in by the butler.

But he found Penhala pacing up and down the length of the inner hall, so he waited for him, near the fire-place at the lower end, where there was no chance of their conversation being overheard through the open glass doors leading into the entrance hall.

Eli Tregua had eaten Penhala's bread for more than twenty years past, and never once in all those years had it tasted bitter in his mouth.

This was the thought that flashed through his mind now, as he waited his employer's approach. If he had loved him less, he could better have performed the duty he had in hand.

Perhaps this was why Penhala saw so quickly that there was something terribly wrong afoot. Tregua had not got his conventional enquiry, 'Do you know what's keeping Mr. John out so late to-night,

sir?’ properly out, before Penhala was down on him, with quickened steps and questioning eyes.

‘No; but you’ve come to tell me! What is it, Tregea? Any harm to the lad? Out with it! No breaking it softly, man!’

Tregea answered promptly,

‘No harm to him, that I’ve heard of, sir, but it seems there’s been an accident in the river above the falls—somebody is drowned, and people are trying to make out that it wasn’t an accident, and that Mr. John——’

‘Is a murderer?’ said Penhala, catching him up as he paused.

Already his mind had leapt to certain conclusions. He had guessed why John was late, and knowing the lad had a difficult task in hand—for in insisting on the return of the ring he had reckoned on the chance of its putting an end to the

foolish entanglement—he had made allowances for his unpunctuality. And now, as Tregea faced him, with troubled eyes and faltering speech, and spoke of an accident in the river, an accident in which John was concerned, he grasped instantly at something of the truth, and saw trouble ahead.

‘ Who says this thing of him, Tregea? Who accuses him?’

‘ Morris Edyvean, sir—one of the overseers down to Cluth-hoe mine.’

‘ And—who is it that is drowned?’

‘ The daughter of Mrs. Polwhele.’

‘ Ah!’

‘ The landlady of the “ Miner’s Rest.” ’

‘ That poor little child? Good God, how terrible! And only this morning— Is it certain that she is drowned, Tregea? Are you sure there is no mistake?’

‘ I’m afraid not, sir,’ said Tregea, sorrow-

fully. 'It seems she went in between the bridge and the cliff; a bad enough place at the best of times; and you know what the stream is like just now.'

'A torrent, Tregea; not a stream at all. Poor child, poor child! And Edyvean says it was not an accident, and accuses John. He saw the whole thing?'

'So I gathered—but I was in such haste to get to you——'

'Thank you, Tregea! It was like you.'

He lifted his face suddenly from the contemplation of the glowing logs, and looked Tregea straight in the eye.

'I want you to answer a question without a word of equivocation; without a thought that it is my son you are speaking of. You know what people are saying about my son and this girl? Do you think it was true? Now! the whole truth, Tregea!'

‘I’m afraid it was, sir.’

Tregea had never wished he had been born dumb until that moment, when he saw the look his words brought into Penhala’s face.

But Lance Penhala was not the man to turn his glance aside because a thing was distasteful to him. He put his own feelings into the background, and went on unflinchingly with his questions.

‘Was she a respectable girl, Tregea? Don’t make excuses for John; only just tell the truth. Do you honestly believe John acted like a thorough-paced villain all through the piece?’

More than ever Tregea prayed for dumbness, but with those clear, steady eyes upon him, prevarication was impossible. And maybe, after all, it was better for the lad’s father to hear all there was to hear, in the first place, from a friendly tongue.

‘Sooner or later you’ll hear it, now the poor little thing is gone,’ he said, sorrowfully. ‘Mr. John put a cruel trick on her, sir. He pretended to marry her, up in London last July. The girl showed some sort of paper to my missus, under an oath of secrecy, and she says it wasn’t a proper certificate.’

‘My God!’ cried Penhala, his self-control vanquished utterly by his distress of mind. ‘My God! Tregea, that I should live to hear such a thing as that of my own son.’

He turned aside, and, reaching a hand up to a projection in the carved oak of the mantelpiece, he laid his head against the support of his arm, and muttered brokenly his boy’s name over and over again.

And Tregea, conscious that this was a trouble past the reach of comfort, could only stand quietly on guard, ready to pre-

vent any intrusion on his employer's grief.

‘ You see, sir,’ he began again presently, ‘ what I’m afraid of is that, if there is an inquiry, and this business of the sham marriage comes out, it will go so hard with Mr. John.’

‘ It can’t go harder than he deserves,’ muttered Penhala, with lips that quivered still from the smart of this new blow. ‘ He’s my own son, Tregear; and for ten lonely years past he has been the only creature I’ve had to love or spend a thought on; but I can’t blind myself to the villainy of this business. Whether he lifted his hand against that girl or not, her blood is on his soul, and he will have to suffer for it, one way or another. Perhaps it would be the most merciful thing they could do with him, to hang him ! What is his life likely to be with such a memory as that pressing like a dead weight on his soul? God help

him, and me ! I think my heart is broken, Tregea.'

' Things mayn't be quite so bad as they seem, sir,' said Tregea, trying to speak hopefully. But Lance Penhala shook his head. Knowing what he knew of the object John had in view when he made that last appointment with Hagar Polwhele, he knew also that it was almost impossible for things to seem worse than they really were.

But, though from the beginning he recognised the utter hopelessness of John's position, nobody but Tregea ever knew or guessed at the full depth of his sufferings. What he endured henceforth he kept religiously hidden from the eye of man. All his pride and his affection had been bound up in the one object—his boy, and now pride and affection lay stifled in the mire of a base, cowardly cruelty.

Sometimes it seemed to him that, if he had known beyond all doubt that John had pushed Hagar into the torrent, as Edyvean asserted, he could have forgiven even that unpremeditated crime, sooner than the calm, pre-arranged cruelty of the sham marriage.

But after that first irrepressible outburst of grief, he kept his opinions shut up in his own mind.

Even on that first night of his downfall, by the time Mrs. Polwhele and Edyvean arrived at the house, escorted by a dozen or so of the scared customers from the 'Miner's Rest,' to make their accusation against John, even so soon after the shock as that, he had assumed the curious, rigid self-possession which he maintained ever afterwards, when dealing with John and his backslidings.

Of all the little crowd collected round

the open door in the shelter of the big porch, only Tregea guessed ever so slightly at the anguish that lay behind the coldness of his white, stern face, the level stillness of his voice, the laboured quietness of his manner. The poor mother's noisy grief dropped to silent sobbings as she listened to his measured words, and even Edyvean's frothy, hysterical denunciations died away to nothingness, before the quiet dignity of Penhala's bearing. There was almost a touch of shame in his manner as he slunk to the rear of the crowd, and leant against the side of the porch listening to Penhala.

‘What can I say to you in the face of such a tale of cruelty as this you bring to me?’ he said, with one hand on the weeping woman's shoulder, and his troubled eyes on her poor, tear-blistered face. ‘If you have lost your only child, so have I ;

and I think mine is the worse case of the two. At least you can think lovingly of your child, and even that comfort is denied to me—my son is lost to me, soul and body! Even if the law pronounce him guiltless of this crime of murder, he is none the less dead to me. Henceforth your daughter's destroyer is as a stranger in his father's house, and his father's heart. Don't think of me as your enemy in this terrible calamity—John Penhala must take the consequences of his own acts on his own shoulders—let him clear himself of this accusation if he can, he will have no help from me. It is justice you want, and justice you shall have. In any case I will not throw the weight of my money and influence into the scale against you. The case shall be tried on its merits, that I promise you.'

‘Then,’ said Edyvean, lifting himself from the support of the porch, and towering above the rest from the rear of the crowd, ‘then he wull sweng for et, that wull he. Hang by the neck till he be dead!’

A faint stiffening of the muscles round his lips was Penhala’s only answer to this, and for an instant there was silence among the group, as if they recognised the wanton brutality of the interruption. And across this silence, from beyond the heads of the little crowd, there struck the noise of advancing wheels, deadened partially by the coating of snow on the drive, and a boy’s fresh voice broke through the gloomy quiet.

‘Hollo! what’s up? Is it carols? How ripping! Here I am, Uncle Lance! How jolly it seems to be at home again!’

And Stanislaus Petrovsky himself, past

master in the art of plotting though he was, could not have arranged the thing better to suit his own purpose.

CHAPTER V.

A DOG WITH A BAD NAME.

JANUARY was nearly over when they brought poor little Hagar Polwhele home again to Carn Ruth. The body had been found in a narrow inlet twenty miles to the north. Edyvean's prophecy had come very near the truth—the sea and the rocks between them had made cruel havoc of the girl's prettiness, and for all actual evidence to the contrary, it might as probably have been a complete stranger as Hagar Polwhele. There was the pretty

dark hair, and the height, and there was also the fact that no other young woman was known to be missing anywhere on that coast. This was really all the coroner and the jury and witnesses had to go upon in forming a decision as to the identity of the body.

But there are certain conditions of public opinion in which a very little evidence will go a very long way, and the condition of public opinion in regard to the Carn Ruth murder was a case in point.

Since folks had heard of that sham marriage in London, the popular indignation against John Penhala had reached the white heat stage; and perhaps the jury and the witnesses did not much care whether the poor, battered remains they were holding an inquest on, were really those of Hagar Polwhele or not, so long as they provided them with an excuse for re-

turning a verdict of wilful murder against that cruel young limb of the devil, John Penhala.

Of course it was Edyvean's evidence that put the rope round his neck. After hearing what he had to say under oath, it only became a matter of catching the criminal and hanging him.

All these weeks, ever since Edyvean had burst into Mrs. Polwhele's bar on that snowy December night, and denounced John Penhala as the murderer of Hagar Polwhele, the Carn Ruth people had talked of one thing, and one thing only—John Penhala's unmitigated brutality.

And young Paul Petrovsky, running hither and thither among them during his somewhat lonely holidays, picked up a good deal of knowledge on the subject, although the topic was never openly dis-

cussed in his presence. These Cornish fishermen and miners were too well bred to make a mistake of that kind.

But they would have been genuinely shocked if they had known how much actual information on the subject the lad had gathered from the fragmentary odds and ends he had overheard of their discussions ; and this in spite of their desire to keep all such knowledge from him.

It was Tregea who first set the boy's precocious wits to work. He took him aside that first night of his home coming, and warned him against mentioning John's name in Mr. Penhala's presence ; but he refused to tell why this was to be so, and, his curiosity thus aroused, it followed naturally that Paul set to work to find out for himself.

It was one afternoon about a fortnight after the boy's arrival from Rugby, on his

return from a lounge round the town, that he fastened himself in his own room and unlocked his desk—a present from his father—and took from a cleverly contrived recess at the back of the pen-tray a letter in his father's handwriting.

‘The eve of my execution,’ was the date it bore, and it began with a doubt as to whether it would ever reach the person it was intended for.

But Paul passed over all that part—he knew it already by heart—the admonition to never slacken in his devotion to The Cause, to nurse his Russian assiduously for use in the future, so that when the opportunity came to him, as come it would, to strike a blow for the liberation of his unhappy country, he might be fully qualified for any service demanded of him.

All that part of the letter he knew word

for word. It was another passage he wanted to look at now, a passage which referred to the possibility of John Penhala's disinheritance.

‘If he should ever offend his father so grievously as to bring about such a disaster, the Penhala money would beyond all doubt come to you. And my last command to you is, to bid you remember that the son of your father can possess nothing independent of The Cause. We men of the Kurtz family hold our last kopec in trust for the purposes of our masters—you, in particular, Paul, will not need to be reminded that everything you possess—health, wealth, happiness, liberty, life—must be held in trust only, at the command of our leaders, to be devoted directly to the advancement of our undying desires, and, indirectly, to the avenging of your father's death—the two purposes

are indissoluble—in furthering the one you must of necessity forward the other. Now heed what I am going to tell you. John Penhala has, by his own action, forfeited all right to his father's wealth—never mind how, it is enough for you that *I know this to be so*. Very well! If, at his twenty-first birthday, John is still in favour with his father, you are to post the enclosed letter to your uncle with your own hands, without taking a creature into your confidence on the matter. If, on the other hand, your uncle's eyes have already been opened to his son's true character, and there is open dissension between them, you are to burn the letter unopened. John once disgraced, the future is entirely in your own hands, see that you use your opportunities.'

With the thin, closely-written sheets spread out on the window-ledge, to catch

the waning light of the January afternoon, and with his head supported in his hands, Paul pored for a long time over his father's explicit directions ; and when at last he lifted his glance to look out at the lawns below, and the stretch of throbbing waters beyond, there was a weirdly old look on his face, a look that would have made his mother's heart ache had she been there to see it. Was it that there was no longer any *childhood* in the lad's soul ? had his boyish instincts shrivelled up and withered away, under the fierce heat of the furnace through which he had passed while yet a baby ? Was his heart like an ear of wheat stunted by drouth, prematurely hardened and yellowed, giving forth all the outward tokens of maturity while there is still no grain in the husk ?

Little need indeed to fear that he would miss his opportunities from any undue soft-

ening of the heart, any flaccid leanings towards mercy. Even now, watching the waters whereon John and he had spent those happy two days in the summer, he rebuked himself for remembering his cousin's pleasant kindness, telling himself stoically that at such a moment the memory amounted to an act of treason against The Cause. A withered ear indeed, an empty husk, hardened prematurely for want of nourishment, what fruit shall you yield in harvest time in return for the ground you have cumbered?

The Carn Ruth Tragedy had provided the London papers with a splendid stop-gap during the dull weeks intervening between Christmas time and the meeting of Parliament. With that delicate sense of justice so conspicuous in the English journalist up to date, most of them had from the first designated it 'The Carn

Ruth Murder!' setting forth the title in heavy type day after day, and gathering enough details, real or imaginary, to fill a column.

Between the lot of them, they kept the public fully informed of all that was going on in the obscure little Cornish fishing and mining town, and long before the coroner held his inquiry on those unrecognisable remains at Carn Ruth, all the rest of the world had finally and definitely made up its mind on the subject of John Penhala's guilt; and many and loud were the outcries against the stupidity of the police, because of their inability to put their hands on the missing murderer. And nowhere were these outcries louder and more frequent than among the lower classes, 'the honest labouring man,' and his associates.

On the day following the Carn Ruth

enquiry there was a select coterie of these sons of toil gathered together in the parlour of a small public-house at Barking. This delightful suburb of London owns a population composed almost exclusively of the artizan class, and from that downwards, with a stratum somewhere in its complex entirety of the maritime element. For Barking Creek is always more or less crowded with smacks, and lighters, and barges, and small coasting vessels; and their crews are always very much in evidence in the streets, and shops, and bars of the unlovely river-side settlement.

To-day one of these small coasters had arrived from Cornwall, with a cargo of granite from the Penrhyn quarries, and two members of her crew, as soon as the day's duties were over, made their way in company to the parlour of the 'Merry Minstrel,' to join the social circle already

gathered there. Rough-looking fellows they were, both of them, only there was this difference in their roughness, that whereas one, the elder, looked as if he were making the best of a roughness natural to him, the other had the appearance and bearing of one who wilfully exaggerates his inborn disadvantages. There was an aggressive air of blackguardism about him, which showed itself in his unwashed face and hands, his touzled head, his carelessly huddled-on clothes, and his half sulky, half swaggering gait. There was that about him to-night, as he slouched into the flaring light of the 'Merry Minstrel' bar-parlour, which seemed to say to everybody who was interested in the matter,

‘Here I am, a regular rough un! As rough as you make ’em, and no pretence.

Them as don't like me as I am, can leave me alone, and there's an end of it.'

The men already gathered round the table bore, as a rule, some signs of having 'smartened up a bit' for the evening's festivity, and, as they noted the undiluted ruffianism of the new-comer's appearance, there was a touch of resentment in the glances they cast at him.

The elder of the two was evidently an old acquaintance, and was greeted with some show of eagerness.

'You're just the chap we're wanting, Joe Hellyar!' said the gentleman who occupied the chair at the head of the table. 'Glad to see you again! When did you come up?'

'On this marning's tide,' answered Joe, shaking hands with the two or three nearest him, and seating himself on the

end of a form as the others pushed up to make room for him.

‘Same cargo as usual, I suppose?’ some one asked.

‘Saame as usual,’ returned Joe. ‘We begin unloading to-morrer.’

‘Are you come straight from Cornwall?’ inquired the chairman.

‘Ay, straaight as crass winds would allaow of,’ returned Joe, speaking strictly by the card. ‘We’ve been better nor three weeks beating up channel.’

‘Then mebbe you don’t know the latest news about the murder that was done down your parts?’

‘Es there any fresh news?’ asked Joe, a new vivacity flashing into his quick eyes. ‘Hev the gell turned up again after all?’

‘She’s turned up in a sort of way, yes. The coroner held an inquest on her body

yesterday, and the jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder against the young blackguard as pushed her in—Penhala.’

‘Eh, my dears, but that’ll be a terrible day’s work for his father,’ said Joe, compassionately; and immediately there arose a chorus of enquiries.

‘Do you know the people at all, Joe?’
‘Is the place in your part of Cornwall?’
‘What sort of a chap is this John Penhala?’ ‘Just a slip of a girl, wasn’t she, Joe?’

For the moment Joe was master of the situation. Everyone’s eye was on him; he had, all in an instant, acquired a new and vivid interest for them, because of this possibility of personal acquaintance with the actors in the Cornish tragedy. Nobody had a thought or a glance to spare for the lonely man near the door, nobody saw him reel back against the wall as if

an invisible hand had dealt him a mighty blow, they were all too absorbed in their new interest in Hellyar. But he was too honest to make a bid for notoriety at the expense of truth.

‘I caan’t saay as I’m parsonally acquainted with Maaster Penhala myself,’ he said, regretfully. ‘But maybe my cumrade, Jahn Smeth, knows summat of ’em. Aw, Jahn Smeth, my dear,’ he broke off, as, turning to include his friend in the conversation, he found him still standing solitary at the end of the room, ‘es theare ne’er a plaace at tabble for ee? Come ee heere, lad, aw’ll maaake room for ee.’

But the unwashed man at the door showed no inclination to accept his comrade’s friendly offer. He drew a grimy hand from his pocket and passed it across his lips, as if he feared their tremor might arouse curiosity, and pulled his shapeless

cap lower on his brow, and turned towards the door.

‘I wooan’t trubble ee, thank ee, Joe,’ he answered, sullenly, his Cornish every whit as broad as the other’s. ‘Company’s too smurt for I, lad. I’ll just drink my pint in the bar outside, and get back to the boat.’

‘Aw, my dears!’ said the amiable Joe, looking from the closed door to the faces round the table in great distress, ‘to thenk of that now—and the lad’s first trip out of hes own country too. He’s a clain off hand on a boat, aw, that un es; but un’s got no manners to spaik of—how shud un? He’s never been nowheer’s but in the mines and among the pilchard boats. Us travellers must maake allowance for hes want of manners, cumraades.’

‘Don’t bother yourself, mate,’ said the chairman, consolingly. ‘We don’t expect

politeness from uncultivated savages. The boy ull get learnt better by-and-by. What are the folks down in your parts saying about this fine gentleman of a murderer at Carn Ruth ?'

John Smith out in the bar called for his drink, sixpennyworth of brandy, and drank it at a gulp, and, throwing a shilling on the counter, called for another.

The woman behind the bar looked rather curiously at her customer as she supplied him with the second dose.

'Have a biscuit with it,' she said, pleasantly. 'You look a bit fainty like—the spirit will do you more good if you take a mouthful of something with it.'

He muttered a curt 'Thank you,' under his breath; but she noticed that he did not follow her advice, though she pushed the biscuit-jar invitingly towards him.

The good-natured soul was so accus-

tomed to slovenliness and unwashed faces among her customers that John Smith's appearance did not horrify her to any great extent; certainly not enough to prevent her seeing that he was in 'a bit of trouble.' He looked pitifully desolate and heart-broken, she thought, and there was a mazed, lost look about him that went straight to her heart and set it aching.

And perhaps it might have been good for John Smith had he been conscious of that one touch of human sympathy that night. As he waited there, fingering his glass, a newspaper-boy passed down the street; and, as he caught the shrill cry, the Cornishman shot out at the door and bought a paper. He did not return at once, standing outside in the flaring light of the windows to read something which seemed to have a very great interest for him.

It was the account of the coroner's inquest at Carn Ruth that he was reading, and when he came to Morris Edyvean's evidence his breath quickened and his grip on the paper tightened. Lies all of it—cruel, heartless, murderous lies ! But, lies or the truth, that evidence of Edyvean's would, in the absence of rebutting testimony, hang the man it was directed against as surely as the most unsullied truth from a crowd of witnesses.

The reader's hand shook as he stuffed the paper into his pocket. The other trembling hand was already at his throat, as if he would fain rid himself of a sensation of strangulation. Then he suddenly remembered the untasted brandy in the bar, and turned back for it. The man next to him was folding up a newspaper, and beating the packet flat with his closed fist on the metal-topped counter in front

of him. A dirty drunken sot he was, with 'loafer' writ large over his filthy person and drink-soddened face.

'I wish it was 'im I'd got here instead of this 'ere paper,' he was observing to a kindred spirit, when John Smith first lent an ear to his conversation. 'I'd spoil 'is beauty for 'im. I'd pound 'im flat as I'm a-pounding this paper. But now, you mark my words, my boy—because 'e's the son of a gentleman, 'e'll get off. If it was a poor, down-trodden, hard-workin' labourin' man like you or me what 'ad done it, we should swing for it, and everybody 'ud say, "Sarve 'im right!" But it 'ull be quite a different thing with this elegant young slip of the haristocracy. The cussed young devil! a-gettin round that poor gell with 'is soft voice an' 'is coaxin' ways, and then rounding on 'er like that as soon as she got a bit troublesome. Hangin'g's too

good for 'im, the heartless young black-guard. I hope with all my 'eart and soul as they'll catch him, with all my 'eart and soul I do !'

'Oh, they'll catch 'im,' returned his friend, 'and it's my opinion they'll hang him too, haristocrat or not. You see the pertickerlers of the case are so dead agin 'im all through. They'll hang 'im right enough, and a good job, too. Such warmin as 'im ought to be cleared off the face of the earth.'

John Smith did not drink his second dose of brandy, he left it untouched on the counter—forgot all about it, apparently, in a sudden violent desire to get out into the street.

There had been a slight fall of snow during the afternoon, and the pavement was coated with inches of half-melted, foul slush, into which the feet sank at every

step, and the cold of which penetrated the thickest shoe leather.

But John Smith, ploughing his way through the yielding slime, knew nothing of the discomfort of his surroundings. The news of the Carn Ruth verdict had dropped upon him like a thunder-bolt. In the moments when his grief and self-reproach for Hagar's death had been keenest, he had never contemplated such a possibility as this. His flight had been the result of a scare, and, that once over, he had never expected to be accused of having wilfully caused the death of his poor little sweetheart. But for the nervous collapse which had seized on him after the tragedy, he would never have allowed Morris Edyvean's hysterical denunciations to scare him into the folly of flight. But fear had gripped him, and he had acted upon it, and the world had accepted his disappearance as proof of

his guilt, and was clamouring for his life in return for that poor child's. His fellow-creatures could think this thing of him—that he could crown his foul villainies towards the girl he had wronged so bitterly by lifting his hand against her!

Of what account to him were such things as half-frozen pavements and biting winds? Just then there was room in his mind for one desire only—to find a place where he could rest for a few minutes, without feeling that the people around him were mentally condemning him to death; to find some cranny or corner where he could listen to the sound of the human voice, without hearing himself branded as a murderer; to shake off, if but for a few seconds, this ghastly sensation of the world's undying enmity towards him, of his eternal isolation in the midst of his kind, this burdensome consciousness of his

own repulsiveness in the sight of his fellow-men, this terrible knowledge that he was indeed an Ishmaelite, in so far that every man's hand was against him, and that he was an outcast and a wanderer from the land of his fathers, homeless, hopeless, and desolate exceedingly.

Plodding along, with his hands deep in his pockets, and his eyes seldom lifted from the space of pavement immediately ahead of his feet, he traipsed the streets hour after hour—spent with fatigue, yet knowing nothing of it; exhausted from want of food, but unconscious of the pangs of hunger; chilled to the marrow by exposure to the biting north-east wind, yet unaware of his own intense physical wretchedness—enwrapped, soul and body, in a muddled maze of misery, which shut out all consciousness of his physical self, all thought of such trifles as comfort or safety.

Safety! What indeed did that count with him in this apathy of suffering? Once or twice, when the thought of his possible arrest did glance across his trouble-dimmed mind, it came to him with a thrill that was more like relief than terror. For then at least this hunted feeling would no longer be with him day and night; he would no longer be secretly consumed, sleeping and waking, by the knowledge that the man standing next him in a public bar, the people who passed by him on the pavement, the whole population of this great city were, one and all, eager to hunt him down, would turn upon him as hounds upon their quarry, if they once suspected his true individuality.

Safety! If this continued concealment, this constant anticipation of discovery was safety, danger itself would be welcome by way of contrast.

Perhaps it was this very indifference to danger which saved him from suspicion. Certain it is that, in those first terrible days—while the knowledge was still new to him, that, in the sight of his fellow-men, he bore the brand of murder on him—in those early days of the quest suspicion never came near him; he passed unscathed through the hue and cry of search, into the comparative security of a disheartened pursuit.

Another murder was occupying the public mind, interest in his capture slackened, and the police centred their attention on the chase after the newer criminal, hoping by a brilliant success in this affair to obliterate the memory of their past failure.

CHAPTER VI.

A GLIMMER OF DAWN.

So there came a time when John Smith, with an increased ruffianliness in his appearance and manners, was able to mix with his fellows again, without experiencing that horrible feeling that their hands were longing to be at his throat. And then a new terror faced him—death by starvation.

The night he tramped away from Barking, and severed the last connecting link between himself and Cornish asso-

ciations, was already some weeks behind him in the past, when this new peril threatened him. The money he had on him had provided him with food and lodging of a sort—the sort which, for a hunted man, was safer than any other—until now.

And now the first overpowering horror of his own position was growing dulled by time and familiarity, and the love of life—even such a life as he was living now, the life of a rat in a hole—had returned to him; as it was bound to do. And to live one must eat, and to eat one must have food, and to have food one must pay for it, and to pay one must have money, and at last there came a day when he changed his last shilling!

All his life long he remembered the morning afterwards, when he woke up with his money clasped as usual in his

hand under his pillow, and, drawing it forth, found two penny pieces in his palm.

He lay a long time that morning wondering what he should do.

The week's rent of the squalid, grimy den he was occupying was due to-day, and credit was out of the question. He shivered as he imagined himself putting such a request to the slatternly grimy-faced shrew downstairs. At midday the rent was due, and at midday she would expect it. But for this consideration he would probably have lain in bed the day through. Hunger is less keen perhaps in bed than elsewhere, and he was hungry already, having put himself on short commons these last three days in order to make his money last as long as possible. The thought of facing the attack of that foul-tongued virago downstairs, however, was

more alarming than the thought of fainting from hunger on the pavement. He rolled off the bed a little after eleven o'clock, put on his mud-encrusted boots, and stealing cautiously downstairs reached the street in safety.

He had been lodging in one of the side streets off the City Road. Wandering on in a purposeless fashion, he turned westward when he reached the big busy thoroughfare, and slouched straight along till he came to the 'Angel' at Islington.

He waited some little time here, among the bustle at the corner, watching the people get in and out of the omnibusses, wondering dully whether there was anyone among them whose worldly possessions were limited to the sum of twopence, and whether any of them were quite so hungry as he was. But the constable who regulated the omnibus traffic turned

sharply on him presently, and ordered him about his business—for John Smith's appearance at this time was anything but a letter of recommendation in itself, and the policeman probably credited him with designs on the pockets of the passing pedestrians.

He took the command to move on meekly enough—hunger has a curiously taming influence on the human species—one of the signs of acute differentiation between humanity and the brutes—and held on his way down the hill, past the big railway stations to the Euston Road.

His hunger was approaching famine by this time, and yet he held back from spending his two-pence. It formed the last frail barrier between him and absolute want; that once gone, what lay beyond? So he held on desperately, enduring the pangs of starvation as best he might, and

finding some curious touch of compensation in jingling his coppers against one another in his pocket, and running over in his mind all the different things to eat which that two-pence would buy.

When he came to the Regent's Park gates he dawdled about, watching his opportunity to slip past the park keeper into the enclosure. His knees were beginning to shake under him, and though it was bitterly cold—cold with that cruel keenness peculiar to the London streets at the beginning of March—he had a strong desire to get into the park, and rest himself on one of the more sheltered seats.

By dint of perseverance and patience he accomplished his purpose, and got into the park, where he spent all the early hours of the cold, grey, unlovely afternoon, huddled up at the end of a seat, with his chin resting on his breast, and

his chilled hands pressed between his shaking knees, in a vain attempt to keep some touch of warmth in them.

It was a conclusive sign of the utter hopelessness of his mental condition, that he was incapable of forming the slightest plan for the future; he was drifting onwards towards death by starvation, because he was too heart-broken to give thought to any matter beyond the fact and manner of Hagar Polwhele's death, and his own position as the cause, if not the actual perpetrator, of the tragedy. His mind was never entirely free from the thought that, though he had had no active hand in her death, he was, before God and man, responsible for it; and with this ever present consciousness of guilt upon him, he had no courage for anything. He was a rudderless vessel, without aim or purpose, adrift on the waters of life.

Sitting there in the bitter cold of the March wind, which found its way to him through the clumps of laurels behind him, he did what he had not dared to do during these two months of desolate degradation—he looked backward, and drank his fill of the waters of Marah.

He grew a touch light-headed by-and-by, and when a little lad, with dark curly hair and big brown eyes, after observing him shyly from the other end of the seat, edged up to him, and stooping, looked up into his face, he thought for a brief instant that it was Hagar, and brushed his half-numbed hand across his forehead in pitiful dismay.

‘You, at least, know that I didn’t do it,’ he muttered, huskily. ‘Cruel though I was to you, I would have died rather than lay a rough finger on you, my pretty darling!’

The little child opened his velvety eyes in a sorrowful wonder. The beggar-man's talk was Greek to him, but, with the unerring instinct of childhood, he recognised the signs of suffering in the pinched face before him, and a divine pity flooded his pure little soul.

‘Have you been naughty?’ he asked, in his sweet, clear treble. ‘Is some one angry wif you? My g’anma says God is angry wif us when we are naughty. Is God angry wif you?’

John Smith said nothing, only gazed at the bonny creature in silence.

‘Ven you must be sorry,’ continued the small missionary, ‘and God will forgive you; g’anma says so. Are you sorry? I fink you are. Will you say you’re sorry?’

‘God! yes, I’m sorry! if that will do any good,’ said John Smith, speaking with

such intensity that the words sounded more like an outbreak of ferocious anger than a confession of repentance.

The child just for an instant looked scared at the vehemence of the sudden outburst. His experience of penitence was probably confined to a less passionate emotion. But his fright was over in a breath, and he was all love and pity again.

‘I knew you were sorry,’ he said, and he laid a warm little dumpling of a hand in a pretty knitted glove on John Smith’s grimy, slender, flexible fingers. ‘Here’s a new penny for you,’ he went on; ‘g’anma gave it to me to buy a cake wif; but I ain’t a bit hungry, and I fink you are. God will forgive you if you’re sorry.’

‘Master Claud!’ broke in a woman’s shrill voice from behind the shrubs, ‘where are you? You naughty boy! How dare you hide away?’

Master Claud slipped off the seat and ran a few steps, stopping, before he finally disappeared round the bushes, to nod his lovely little head at the bent figure on the seat and repeat,

‘Mind you be sorry. God will forgive you if you’re sorry.’

John Smith sat looking at the bright coin in his hand. Sorry? Was not his whole life a blank expanse of hopeless sorrow and remorse? Sorry? The coin lost some of its brightness as he asked the useless question of himself, and he did not know whence came the sudden dimming of his sight, until big tears came splashing down on Master Claud’s new penny. Ay, he was sorry enough; God help him!

It was dark before he left the park. His craving for nourishment was so terrible by this time that he had made up his

mind to spend his money. Close to the park entrance there was a small public-house, up a very narrow passage; he knew the situation quite well. The place was used principally by servants from the big houses in the neighbourhood. This was where he would go for his last meal. Afterwards—perhaps he would give himself into the charge of the first policeman he met—in prison they would at least feed him.

When he had had his bread and cheese and glass of beer, he stood watching a group of men in the next compartment, gathered round another who was performing sleight-of-hand tricks with a pack of cards.

The food he had eaten had not half-satisfied his ravenous hunger, but the contrast between his past and present condition was strong enough to make him look back with actual terror to the suffer-

ings of the last few hours. Anything, he told himself, would be better than a repetition of this afternoon's experience; sooner than go through such agony again, he would hand himself over to the care of the police, or put an end to his troubles for good, by whatever means came first within his reach.

Having come to this decision, a curious spell of recklessness fell upon him.

'Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow ye die,' he quoted to himself, as he watched the performer in the next division of the bar.

He was a boastful sort of fellow, and after each trick he had a way of saying, 'I'll give half-a-crown to anybody here who can tell me how it's done.'

John Smith, watching his movements, presently saw him do a trick which he knew perfectly well, and, without stopping to think what he was doing, he said as much.

The conjurer—an amateur, evidently—dropped his jaw, and tried to get out of his bargain, but the others laughingly insisted that the unwashed gentleman should have a try; and John Smith was invited to come round to the other compartment and show what he could do.

And John Smith went, and took the cards into his hands and began to shuffle them.

And the men gathered round him, watching the smooth, easy grace of his movements, wondered at it, even more than at the skill of the tricks he performed for them.

As he stood in the midst of the sleek, well-fed gentlemen's servants, with his head well thrown back, and a smile on his white, pinched face, his long chestnut hair falling in wavy masses on either side of his head, and his slender, subtle fingers

working whatever wonder they willed among the inanimate cards, the poor, half-starved, forsaken-looking wretch was transformed under their very eyes, until it seemed to them that the mere touch of the cards had inspired him.

They could not guess—how should they—that hunger and terror and shame had ceased to exist for him, that he was back in the past, in a brilliantly-lit room, the centre of a delighted circle of well-dressed people, living over again the pleasant excitement of a successful first appearance as an amateur magician, in his father's drawing-room.

They were a discriminating audience, for they had seen the best things of this kind in their masters' houses, and John Smith, discovering this, rose to the occasion, and excelled himself.

And when the exhibition was over, he found himself possessed of four shillings and threepence, and the pack of cards—a present from their defeated owner.

And a man, who had watched the performance from the less select division of the bar, joined him as he left the house, and dropped into conversation with him.

‘I can see you’re only half-clothed, and you look as if you wasn’t more’n half-fed neither,’ he said, after a few preliminary remarks. ‘Strikes me you must be a durned soft fool to get into such a state as that, while you’ve got the making of a fortune in them nimble fingers o’ yourn. What’s yer name, mate?’

‘John Smith.’

‘S’help me now, if that ain’t a coincidence! I’m John Smith too! Shouldn’t wonder if we was related somehow. Do

you want to pick up another bob or two with the cards before bed-time? Because, if you do, I can show you a likely pitch.'

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN SMITH WASHES HIS FACE.

Mrs. BOXFORD was delighted with her new lodger, and exceedingly glad of the long let of six weeks, reaching from the third week in July until the end of August.

Mrs. Boxford's pretty cottage stood a mile outside Chichester, in one of the lovely, sheltered lanes which abound in that part of Sussex; and at that particular period of the year Mrs. Boxford's spare rooms were usually let to people who were down for Goodwood races. But she had

been delighted to accept Miss Fentimore as a lodger ; first and foremost, because a six weeks' let is better than a fortnight's any day ; and secondly, because she took a fancy at first sight to Mary Fentimore's pleasant manner, her sweet smile, and charming face.

It would be something of a relief, Mrs. Boxford confided to her husband—Lord Haphazard's head-keeper—to have a pleasant, sweet-faced young woman about the house, instead of the loud-voiced, card-playing young men, who generally occupied her best parlour and two spare rooms during the race-week.

Miss Fentimore had been perfectly frank with the good motherly woman, when she came over from Portsmouth early in June to take the rooms.

' She was a member of Mr. Wilfred Bur-

lington's Opera Company,' she said. 'Mr. Burlington had decided to give his company a six weeks' vacation during the height of the summer—from the middle of July to the end of August—and she wanted to find quiet country lodgings for that time. She had been a little over-worked lately, singing sometimes four times a week, and she was feeling the need of a long spell of perfect rest and quietness, away from all the bustle and distractions of town-life.'

'And you'll get it here, miss,' Mrs. Boxford had assured her. 'Maybe, just during the race-week, you'll have to keep a bit close to the house of an evening; for there's a queer lot of characters about the place just then. But once that's over, you can stroll about the woods and meadows and plantations and lanes from daylight

till bed-time, and never need to so much as put a pair of gloves on for the company you'll meet.'

'That is exactly what I want,' said Mary, openly delighted with the prospect, and the arrangement was concluded there and then.

Mrs. Boxford was quick enough to see that this operatic artiste was likely to be a model lodger—quiet and regular in her habits, and keeping no company to speak of, and congratulated herself on 'a good summer let.'

And Miss Fentimore more than fulfilled her landlady's anticipations; she revelled in the quiet and retirement of the country life, and began to ask herself, before she had been a week in her new quarters, whether she had not after all made a mistake in her choice of a profession.

Her father had been a bookseller in the

city of York, a man very highly thought of and respected by all those of his fellow-citizens whose good opinions were worth having; but keenness in business matters did not rank among his claims on the good opinion of his neighbours. And so it followed that at his death, two years ago, his affairs were found to be in anything but a flourishing condition; and Mary discovered that, when everything was realised, and the estate cleared from debt, there would be an income of something less than fifty pounds a year left as her portion.

Faced thus by the necessity of, in part at least, earning her own living, she had decided to utilise her voice, and so make capital out of the money spent on its training. She had already something of a local reputation, having made several appearances in the choral concerts of her native city, and she found very little diffi-

culty in obtaining an engagement in one of the travelling operatic companies.

But she had not taken very kindly to the life. Her love for her art was pure and enthusiastic, but she found very little artistic enthusiasm among the members of Mr. Burlington's company. Singing, as an art, they thought very little of, but they thought a good deal of it as a means of gaining applause, heaps of it, and especially applause that should be a little noisier or a little more prolonged than that bestowed on their companions.

She never forgot the first time that *Trovatore* was performed after she had become a member of the company.

She was not singing herself, but she was in the Green-Room, waiting to ascertain the hour of the next day's rehearsal, when the two ladies, Leonore and Azucena, passed through on the way to their dressing-rooms,

after taking a call before the curtain. The contralto, all smiles and pleasure, passed on with a splendid bouquet to her nose, the soprano flung her bouquet on the ground with an expression of petulant contempt, stamped it flat under her high-heeled shoe, kicked it violently against the opposite wall, and went off, leaving the mangled flowers behind her, filling the whole room with the sweetness of their dying breath.

Mary Fentimore held her breath and wondered; and two men on the other side of the room looked at one another and laughed.

‘What was wrong with the Morelli’s flowers to-night,’ asked one. ‘Weren’t they as good as Miss Betterton’s?’

‘It wasn’t that,’ came the answer. ‘I don’t believe there was a pin to choose between the two bouquets to-night. They

came in the wrong place—that's all. She can't endure that Miss Betterton should have the first bouquet.'

Mary listened and wondered still more; such jealousy as this was something she could not understand.

It was the first sample she had seen of Madame Morelli's furious jealousy, but she was to see many another, and those others were to concern her more nearly; for the Italian prima-donna was always at loggerheads with the second soprano in the company, and this was the position which Miss Fentimore had the misfortune to fill. Things had grown so uncomfortable lately that once Mary had gone so far as to send in her resignation; but Mr. Burlington had prevailed upon her to withdraw it; for by this time his first and second sopranos were running one another close for the position of popular favourite, and he half-hinted to Mary

that, sooner than lose her, he would dispense altogether with the services of Madame Morelli.

And now that she was away from it all—the close, hot air of the side-wings, the ghastly lath and canvas parodies of nature, the unhealthy excitement of facing the audience, and, above all, the personal attacks of her professional rival—now that she was here, amongst the sights and sounds and scents of the country, with God's own sweetness all about her, now that she found herself face to face with nature, unspoiled and unsullied by the influence of man, she liked the thought of a return to that other life less than ever, and longed, as she had never longed before, to shake herself free from it.

She had already been a week in her country quarters before the race-week began, and brought with it that gathering

together of the dregs of society, which follows at the tail of a race-meeting as inevitably as dusk follows after daylight. A curious conglomeration of human vice and criminality it was, that packed itself into the sly chinks and crannies of the lovely old country town of Chichester, during those last few days of July.

There was one troupe of five 'niggers' who had started from their London quarters in the best of spirits. Perhaps, though, it would be safer to say that four were in such boisterous spirits, that the depression of the fifth became a negative quantity in reckoning up the whole. But then, as they all agreed among themselves, there was never any counting on the temper of 'John Smith number two,' from one minute to another. And this time they admitted that, for once, John Smith—better known among his intimates

as 'The Markiss'—had some reason for being down on his luck, for only the night before they left London his especial pal—'John Smith number one'—had gone to kingdom come. And those two John Smiths had been like a pair of Siamese twins—barring the inconvenient circumstance of not being able to turn over in bed without one another's permission—for the last three years or more, ever since John Smith number one had brought John Smith number two, alias the Markiss, into the community of which these gentlemen were shining lights, and gone security for his good faith in the future.

It was natural that the cove should feel a bit cut up at the loss of his pal, they agreed among themselves; but when they found out, during their first day on the course, that this natural regret was likely to seriously interfere with the takings of

the firm, they grew less tolerant of their partner's low spirits, and told him he was not acting fairly by them, in allowing his private troubles to interfere with his briskness in business.

And then there happened what might have happened any time during these last three years, but for the peaceable intervention of the man who had died overnight.

When the other members of the firm began to grumble at the day's takings, and hinted that the falling off was due to the dulness of the man who did the conjuring business, the Markiss 'cut up rough,' said right out that he had had enough of the nigger business, and announced his intention of working on his own account for the future.

There was a big row then, for, in addition to his exhibition of magic, the Markiss sang

tenor in the glees, and his defection was likely to cause a serious difference to them. For a minute or two it seemed doubtful whether he would not have immediate cause to regret his declaration of independence; but while two members of the troupe asserted their intention of 'doing for' the defecting one there and then, the other two insisted upon his right to follow his own inclination.

The whole five of them were too much of a muchness in point of weight and skill, to give any two of them a chance against the other three, if it came to a scrimmage; and so, the Markiss giving the casting vote in his own favour, pacific counsels prevailed in the end, and the threats of bodily violence simmered down to personal remarks of the usual offensive nature.

'He'd been glad enough to join 'em three

years ago, when he was a babby in arms, and didn't know his way about.'

'Yes! cors why? Didn't they know? Cors it 'ud been convenient to him at the time to 'ide his face behind the burnt cork—any fool might know that. Chaps with white 'ands and that almighty finnickin' way of talking, didn't join nigger minstrels from chice.'

'Ah, there was something agin' him, sure enough? And, by God! if the speaker could find it out, wouldn't he just blow the gaff on him, that was all! He'd hid himself among 'em as long as it served his purpose, and now they could go to blazes for all he cared. Perhaps, though, he wasn't so safe out of the wood even now. Maybe that was why he'd grown a beard this last six months, and maybe after all he'd find a beard wasn't such a safe disguise as the burnt cork had been.

More likely than not he'd live to wish himself among his coloured friends agin.'

But the Markiss took no notice of the verbal bricks being flung at him; he made up his small bundle, washed his face, and walked out of the attic-room, down the ricketty stair to the street, a free man.

He found the court where their lodgings were situated quite deserted when he reached the pavement, and even in the wider high-street, teeming with humanity a short time ago, there were no signs of life at this hour. Up and down the highway, as far as he could see, there was not even a twinkling light in a window, to speak to him of human companionship, the whole city lay sleeping under the spangled purple of the solemn sky.

Standing there, with that curiously accentuated feeling of loneliness upon him, which only comes to one shut off from his

kind in the heart of a thronged city, with the stars gazing down at him from above the irregular sky-line of the houses across the way, and all around him the scented silence of the summer night, an emotion nearly akin to elation stole upon him, followed by a touch of wondering surprise at his own lightness of heart, surprise that he had not yet forgotten *how to feel glad*.

Surely the heart of man must possess a strength of endurance, far beyond the power of words to convey, to have gone through what he had gone through, and yet retain the faculty of feeling glad. For though his gladness was sobered, even now, by the haunting memory of much that lay behind him in the past, it was genuine gladness, nevertheless.

And he did well to be glad. He had at last broken away from the ghastly sur-

roundings of those first years of penance. He had promised John Smith he would, and he had done it. He wondered a little whether stout-hearted old John knew how quickly the promise to him had been redeemed.

‘Promise me that you’ll get away from these chaps here the very first chance you get,’ he had said, when the doctor had left them alone, after telling them the end was near; ‘and that you’ll make your way up to Lincolnshire, and give this bundle of papers into my missis’s keeping. It’ll be a good excuse for breaking with these London chaps. And don’t come back among ’em again, my boy—give me your word you won’t.’

And the Markiss had given his word. And here he was, already on the way to fulfil it; only he could not start off direct for Lincolnshire, for the reason that he

had not a penny in his pockets. Because he had been accused of spoiling the day's takings, he had not chosen to ask for his share of them ; and the Markiss never had a penny put by. All those three years he had spent in the London slums, he had got rid of his money as fast as he earned it ; his free-handed recklessness having helped to gain for him the title he had borne among his blackguardly companions.

He would have to stay out the race-meeting in Chichester, and make a few shillings to start him on his journey to his old friend's wife. To-night he would have to lie in the open—for by this time everybody was in bed. Well, there was not much hardship in that on such a night as this. He would go a mile or so outside the town, and creep under a hayrick, or find his way into the heart of a plantation—a plantation of pines, perhaps, with a tangled under-

growth of brambles and bracken, like one he remembered in Cornwall, near the cliffs overhanging the Atlantic breakers.

He would enjoy lying in such a plantation as that to-night; he would lie, with his little bundle for a pillow, and watch the stars peeping through at him, as often as the faint breeze of the summer night brushed the feathery boughs of the pines aside, and gave him a brief, fleeting glimpse of the silent glory beyond. There was a faint touch of something at his heart to-night that was almost like a promise of returning peace—peace for him, who had parted with the dove-eyed, soft-footed messenger of comfort many a weary, vice-stained month ago.

And, with this strange new sensation of rest upon him, he went his quiet way along the fragrant country road, till he had left the last outposts of the city be-

hind him; and then, turning down a lane embowered between spreading hedges, and passing an isolated cottage, slumbering in the embrace of its own luxuriant greenery, he came to a plantation of pines skirting the road, and leapt the low, mossy, stone wall, and—found himself at home!

On the next day an extraordinary piece of luck befell him. A young fool who had won a hatful of money on the great race, was flinging his sovereigns about right and left. The Markiss happened to 'take a pitch' near his party, and the ladies in the carriage chose to admire the strolling wizard's deft manipulation of the cards; a consummation to which his picturesque appearance may in some measure have contributed.

Result, a couple of sovereigns tossed to the Markiss, as if they were a couple of pennies.

The conjurer opened his eyes as he pocketed the gold, and said nothing. This windfall would smooth away the difficulties in the way of his journey to the wife of John Smith number one. It was curious how he held on to that notion of carrying out his promise to his dead friend with as little delay as possible. Perhaps it was because, in all those past years of misery and degradation, he had never had an opportunity of doing anybody a good turn, and the novelty of the thing attracted him; perhaps he snatched at the journey as an occupation only, glad to have once more some purpose in life, some object ahead to aim at, something to lift him for a time above the soul-stifling influences of a life lived for the present moment only, a life without a to-morrow, and, as nearly as he could make it, without a yesterday either; a life as nearly on a level with

that of the brutes as he could render it, and yet worse by far than that of the brutes, because, let humanity degrade itself as it will, it cannot utterly stifle all thought and sense of responsibility.

And now John Smith number two had a little shred of wholesome thought for the restless tendrils of his mind to wrap themselves round about, and having something to look forward to, his old depression loosened its grip somewhat, and he no longer felt the constant need of drink to deaden thought. Such a queer sensation it was—to *dare to think!* To be able to think, on one subject at least, without getting the heart-ache, or wishing himself dead, or flying to the drink for forgetfulness.

And this windfall of the two sovereigns he took as a sign that he was to prosper on this Lincolnshire journey. So elated was he that, meeting the members of his old

firm on his way down the hill at the end of the day, he took one of them into his confidence.

That was one of his many weak points, that he could not suspect another of a meanness impossible to himself.

Because he would have been glad to hear of another's good fortune, it seemed a matter of course to him that others should be glad to hear of his. He was very young yet, very young indeed, for all the lines which trouble had graven on his brow, and round his lips, and in spite of the silver threads, which showed themselves here and there among the long wavy masses of his chestnut hair.

And so, in the fulness of his heart, and because of that new pleasant touch of hopefulness that was on him, he told his old comrades of his slice of luck, and even stood drinks round at the first pub they

came to, and then went on his way towards his last night's camping-ground.

He held out against their invitation to stay and make a night of it, because he intended to be off with the dawn, and he wanted to get a few hours' rest beforehand. And, for another thing, he had lost the old incentive to drink till he was drunk—the power to think was no longer synonymous with the power to suffer. He had something to do, and he needed a clear head to plan how best to do it.

And he was planning his journey as he took his way once again towards Lord Haphazard's pine-woods, too busily occupied with his own affairs, to notice that he was being followed at a distance by someone who seemed particularly anxious to avoid observation, judging from the way he crept along in the shadow.

It struck him once or twice, after he had

composed himself for the night, that he heard sounds of movement in the undergrowth near him, the breaking of a dry twig underfoot, or the springing back of a bramble trail that had been forced out of its natural position by some passing body. But the Markiss did not trouble himself to enquire what the sounds might mean. If poachers were in the woods it was no affair of his, still less was it his affair if the keepers were abroad. So he lay there listening to the whisper of the pine needles, and the distant croaking of a frog, and the occasional lowing of kine from the lord of the manor's dairy-farm close by, until, by and by, his thoughts grew indefinite and disconnected, and the sounds around him ceased to convey any meaning to his brain, and he slept.

Mary Fentimore had adopted the prac-

tice of early rising since her arrival at Love Lane Cottage. That morning half-hour she spent with Mr. Boxford, tramping through the woods to the pheasants' feeding-ground, was one of the most enjoyable times during her whole day. She loved tramping through the dewy woods in the exquisite sweetness and stillness of the new-born day, she loved to watch nature awake, all flushed and fresh, from her night's rest, and it was a delight to her to stand back well in the shadow of the trees, and see the gorgeous birds stealing shyly from the cover into the open, to peck daintily at the strewn grain.

One or another of the dogs would usually accompany them on these occasions, keeping obediently at his master's heels on their way through the plantations, and crouching out of sight in the grass, with

his muzzle on his paws, while the feeding was going on.

On this especial morning Roderick, the setter pup, showed more impatience of control than usual. Once or twice he broke away from the pathway, and went sniffing vigorously among the undergrowth. He always came back at his master's word, but he did it plainly under protest, resuming his investigations the moment the keeper's eye was off him again.

'He's a bit self-willed this morning,' said Mary, presently.

Boxford shook his head, and shot a sharp glance through the brushwood.

'There's something there that hadn't ought to be, as I make it out,' he said. 'The pup wouldn't be so rampageous about nothing. I'll take a look as I come back. I'm a bit late for the birds already.'

‘I’ll go and look now,’ said Mary; ‘and join you on your way back.’

Boxford threw an approving glance over his shoulder at her. She was made of good stuff; such a thing as fear never seemed to come into her head.

‘I shall be back in five minutes, miss,’ he said. ‘I expect it’ll be dead game, you’ll find. Take my whistle, and call out if it’s anything serious.’

Mary took the whistle and turned off through the bushes, with the pup whimpering excitedly in front of her.

Just at the spot where they had left the path the undergrowth was unusually thick, so that it was impossible to see any distance ahead, and so it happened that Mary, skirting round a solid clump of foliage, came, utterly unprepared, upon what she had come to find.

In that first moment of discovery she was not frightened, only startled. The man was lying on his side with his back towards her, and his head pillowed on his outstretched arm. She took in at a glance his black stockings, scarlet knickerbockers, short black jacket, and a mass of wavy chestnut hair.

Evidently one of the wandering minstrels down for the races, who had stolen in here for a night's rest. She was turning away again, when she saw Roderick put his nose close to the sleeping man's head, and sniff.

The next instant she was down on her knees, with the man's face turned up to the sky, and all the blood in her body making an inward rush to her heart.

As her glance fell on the red stain where his head had lain, there was a

moment's qualm; but she pulled herself together heroically, and blew a shrill call on the whistle.

Kind God! How white his face was! Everywhere but just that patch above his temple, where the blood had dried over a horrible wound. Was he dead? No; his heart was still beating. Who and what was he, to be here in such a plight as this? His clothes were those of a wayside mummer, but his delicate features, and the impress of mental suffering, so visible, even in his unconsciousness, in the tense knit of his finely pencilled brows, and the deep lines of thought above his auburn moustache, surely they hinted at something higher in the social scale than a strolling conjurer? And his hands! Beyond all doubt they were the hands of a gentleman. Those long, slender, flexile, tapering fingers, and those well-kept nails

must belong to a man accustomed to the refinements of civilisation. How drawn and strained and troubled was the whole expression of his face! And yet, surely he was quite a young man? He was broad and big, but there was still that suggestion of lissomness in the lines of the throat and shoulders, that slenderness in the loins which seem to hint at further development in the future.

So young in years, and yet so old in suffering!

A great pity welled up in Mary Fentimore's heart as she looked. The broad, candid forehead should have been so smooth and calm, the fine brows should never have taken that permanent knit of sullen suffering—as of one bending beneath a burden beyond his strength. She knew exactly the haunted look his eyes would have. Ah, now he was going to

open them. Heaven, what a spasm of agony that was ! See how his brows came together, and his lips drew back, showing the teeth set hard on one another within !

Would somebody never come !

Again she blew a shrill call on her whistle, and at the sound the eyes of the injured man unclosed in sudden, startled consciousness, and gazed up wonderingly into her own.

And then came the crashing of hurrying footsteps through the undergrowth, and the astonished Boxford strode into view.

CHAPTER II.

‘PART OF THE SHADOW THAT IS ON ME.’

It was three weeks since Mary Fentimore and the pup Roderick had found John Smith in Lord Haphazard’s plantations, three weeks since he had been brought home, insensible, to the cottage in Love Lane, and he was there still.

This was Mary’s doing. ‘Boxford had suggested taking the unconscious man into Chichester, and leaving him in the hands of the authorities, but Miss Fentimore had begged so earnestly that he

might be spared the ordeal of the jolting ride into the town, and had given the good people of the house to understand so unmistakably that they should lose nothing by their kindness to the poor fellow, that it had ended in her having her own way.

Mrs. Boxford, noting the mountebank attire of the stranger, and, drawing her own conclusions from the absolute emptiness of his pockets, had at first refused most decisively to have anything to do with him. But Mrs. Boxford, in her younger days, had known service in good families, and flattered herself that she could always tell an aristocrat by instinct. And Miss Fentimore, knowing of this little weakness of the kind creature's, played upon it shamelessly to gain her own ends.

‘He is no common roadside stroller,’ she said, slyly. ‘Look at his finger-tips, and his almond-shaped nails. Look how

delicate his hands are, for all their sunburn. A woman who knows as much of the aristocracy as you do, Mrs. Boxford, must know that that is the hand of a gentleman. I believe this ridiculous dress is some mad freak. For all we know he may be some very highly-born person—some nobleman's son who was carrying out a practical joke, and fell into bad company, and got rough treatment. Surely we cannot do wrong in showing him a little kindness, till he can tell us who he is, and enable us to communicate with his friends.'

It was this last touch that carried the day. Mrs. Boxford's active imagination took a flying leap into the future; already she pictured herself, in her best silk gown, receiving the thanks of perhaps a duke—or an earl at least—in her own little parlour, and the ambitious dream persuaded her into a folly which her kind-

ness of heart alone would never have countenanced.

So the mountebank was carried into her remaining spare bed-room, and there he remained for three weeks ; attended by the best doctor in Chichester, and nursed by Miss Fentimore and Mrs. Boxford—with the assistance of a hired nurse for the night work.

Even in his delirium he was a model patient, but when that trouble was over and he was rational again, his obedience to orders, and his perfect patience under the tedium and misery of convalescence, made Mary feel sometimes as if she must run away and have a good cry. She had had experience of sick men before, and she knew the state of mind that was natural to them when recovering from an illness ; and, knowing this, she asked her-

self a dozen times a day, what could have been the circumstances of this man's past life to produce such humble-mindedness, such a pathetic gratitude for small services, as he evidently felt.

Sometimes, as she ministered to his comfort, he would watch her about the room with a look in his eyes that brought a lump into her throat; and she would have to run away and fight the folly down by herself. For Miss Fentimore hated nothing more than uncalled-for displays of emotion, and she would never have pardoned herself for giving way to anything of the kind in the presence of her patient. Indeed, she found it rather hard work to forgive herself even for the private indulgence of such folly; but the sad humility, the shamed wonderment of the poor fellow's manner, as he accepted her trifling services, seemed

to hint at such an overwhelming consciousness of his own self-abasement, such a constant sense of his own undeservingness, that she could not always keep her sorrowful pity within bounds.

Of course she was annoyed with herself for giving way in this absurd fashion, and that was why, as he approached convalescence, she withdrew herself gradually from the invalid's room. If she could not remain in his society without behaving like a weak-minded fool, she must keep out of it, that was all.

And so it fell out that, for the last few days of his confinement to his room, John Smith saw nothing of his sweet-faced nurse, and missed her as nobody but a sick person can miss a fellow-creature.

But for all that he never presumed to speak of her to Mrs. Boxford; only won-

dered incessantly whether he should ever see her again, to thank her for her kindness to a castaway who could never hope to repay her.

Sometimes he hoped he should have an opportunity of tendering his thanks in person, at others the mere thought of finding himself again face to face with her would fill him with a wordless dread. With the memory of the life he had lived for the last three years always more or less present in his mind, he felt there was a touch of sacrilege in personal intercourse between himself and such a woman as this. Hitherto he had endeavoured to shut his eyes to his own degradation, but he could no longer be blind to it. In the moral luminosity of a good woman's presence his social defilement stood forth with hideous clearness, and he shrank back appalled at the

sudden self-revelation, at the contrast between his two selves, past and present.

And this was his mental condition when he found himself strong enough to get down over the stairs again, and asked for his clothes, that he might take himself off out of the way of these good Samaritans.

And then it was that he heard Mary's name.

'Miss Fentimore has taken the liberty of getting you some clothes,' Mrs. Boxford told him. 'She thought you might be shy of showing yourself in those masquerading things, when you got about again, and so she ventured to get some others. Boxford took your coat to the tailors for the size, and brought you back a tweed suit.'

John Smith laughed in a kind of feeble desperation.

'I wonder if Miss Fentimore understands the sort of character I am,' he said,

roughly. ‘Do you take me for a prince in disguise, that you overwhelm me with favours like this?’

But Mrs. Boxford only shook her head and said nothing, and left him to make his toilette. And, because his own clothes were nowhere visible, he was forced to attire himself in those of Miss Fentimore’s providing. How did she think he was ever going to repay her, he wondered sardonically; and began to wish that this fairy princess, with the clear limpid gray eyes, and the tender voice, had left him to fight things out in his own fashion, after he had been robbed and half murdered out in the woods yonder.

And when he got out on the staircase presently, and heard no sound of movement in the house, and saw the door below wide to the summer sunshine, a sudden idea came to him to make his escape there

and then, and leave his gratitude for some other day.

But he altered his mind when he reached the open door, for Miss Fentimore was sitting in the garden, and escape by that way was impossible.

The poor wretch was very weak yet, and as he took in the full meaning of the little picture out there in the shadow of the acacia tree—the daintily set out tea-table, the large cane chair, with a rug spread under it and a large cushion at its back, Miss Fentimore herself in a spotless cambric frock, girt round with a pale blue waist-ribbon—as he saw it all, and recognised the fact that the little festival had been got up in honour of his re-appearance, such a mad yearning after the unattainable fell upon him, that the hot tears rushed to his eyes, and he hid his face with his hand, and fell back into the

shadow of the porch to steady himself.

How pure and sweet she looked! The clear pallor of her skin, the healthy red of her lips, the glistening coils of her warm, dark hair, the dainty freshness of her spotless gown, weren't they enough to give the heart-ache to any poor devil who had, by his own iniquity, placed all such things beyond his reach for ever and ever? Ay, his penance was not over yet.

Once again, as he stood there in the creeper-smothered porch, the inclination to get away, somewhere where she could not find him, to release her at once and for ever from the overshadowing influence of his guilty presence, seized upon him; but, before he could pluck back his gaze from her dainty loveliness, she lifted her eyes and saw him, and the next thing he knew was that his hands were in hers, and she was congratulating him on his con-

valescence, with her clear, candid glance raised to his in the outspoken warmth of a pure woman's friendship.

For a brief, blessed breathing space, as she led him to the big cane chair, and arranged his pillows behind him, it seemed to him that those three-and-a-half years of black, blinding misery were nothing but a hideous dream, to be put behind him and forgotten—for a few minutes all his old attractive manner returned to him, and he found himself answering her enquiries as he would have answered them of old, in that long past time of his life which had become a mere memory to him. And then, all in an instant, the full sum of his own enormity rushed back upon him, and he stood up, abruptly checking himself in the midst of a grateful reply to some of her enquiries.

‘What in God’s name am I doing?’ he

burst forth ; and at the sudden anguish in his voice she stopped her little bustle among the cups and saucers, and rested her hands on the edge of the tray, looking up pitifully at him. ‘Miss Fentimore; this farce mustn’t go on any longer. It took my breath away for a moment, when you came to me like—like that—as if I had been an old friend—and greeted me as you would greet an equal; I was too taken aback to set you right at once. It is all a terrible mistake, my kind little lady. I am not the sort of man to be received like this, by you. Do you know the sort of thing I am? I come of the very dregs of the people. When I am at home, I live in that part of London which is known to such as you as The Slums, and my associates are, almost without exception, members of the criminal classes. And I—if I am not in very deed a criminal myself

—I am the next thing to it—I am a rogue and a vagabond, dear lady; that is my title, according to the laws of my country. To descend to detail, I am a Wayside Wizard, who turns a nimble penny by practising the hocus-pocus business at race-meetings and penny fairs. I ask your pardon for presuming to sit in your presence, as I did just now. I forgot myself—you—you——’

‘Forgot myself too,’ Mary put in, with a little smile.

She was startled, there was no denying that, but she was sorry too, more sorry than she could say, for the worn, weary man who stood at the other edge of the small table, bent beneath the heart-breaking consciousness of his own fallen condition.

‘As for presuming to sit in my pre-

sence,' she went on, gently, 'that is all nonsense. You are not strong enough to stand. Even now, you are half-fainting with fatigue. Don't let us waste thought upon such trifles as social distinctions until you are a little stronger. At present our relations towards each other are only those of nurse and patient, and you must be docile and obedient. Let me set your pillows straight for you again. You must rest yourself. Dressing has fagged you. I had a serious illness myself some few years ago, and I remember that the first day I left my room I was ready to cry with exhaustion. Some day, when you are a little stronger, you shall talk to me as much as you like about yourself, but to-day we will talk of pleasant things only.'

Agitation and weakness had set him

shaking, and he offered no further resistance when she gently persuaded him into his chair again.

He was silent for a little, watching her dainty management of the tea-table. He did not remember much about his mother, but he had one clear memory of her, in a white dress, making tea in a garden arbour, with a lawn bathed in the summer sunshine as a foreground, and all around her the flutter of leaves, and the drowsy buzzing of bees, and the gladsome song of the birds.

His mother had been just such another as this girl; and he was—what he was!

‘I thought,’ he said, presently, ‘I expected that you would refuse to have anything more to do with me, when you heard what I really was.’

‘Then you had not formed a very good opinion of me,’ she answered him. ‘But

I am not really so surprised as you seemed to expect; I guessed at something of the sort, you know. But I guessed at something else too—I guessed that things with you had not been always as they are now. And besides,' she hurried on, afraid that he might take this last remark as a hint that she was curious to know more about him, 'there is another reason why I should have stood by you in your trouble—you and I are brother chips—you see we both belong to the community of mummers—I am a public singer. For the past year I have been earning my living as a member of Mr. Burlington's travelling opera company. Perhaps that will make you feel more at home—to know that I am as truly a rogue and a vagabond as you yourself, if we go in for the strict letter of the law.'

A ghost of a smile touched his lips for

an instant, and was gone again; and she, seeing the change it wrought in his face, was seized with a desire to bring it back again.

‘That does not lessen the distance between us, dear lady. There is nothing in common—God forbid that there should be—between you and me; I belong to those who stand in the outer darkness for ever and ever—your lot shall be always full of brightness, and light, and happiness, because of the beauty and goodness of your heart.’

Her eyes darkened with a touch of pain.

‘It is because you are weak that you talk so hopelessly,’ she said. ‘Because you have made some terrible mistake in your past—forgive me! I can’t help guessing at something of the sort—is that any reason why you are never to do good in

the time to come? It is folly! You are so young—the best part of your life is still before you.’

He shook his head.

‘If you knew what my past has been like,’ he said, quietly.

As she looked across at his white, drawn face, a sudden touch of hesitation fell upon her. The colour came and went in her cheeks, and, when she spoke, her timidity was very apparent in her lowered tone, and the tremulousness of her lips.

‘Who has made you a judge of what is pardonable and what not? I do not believe there is any sin we are capable of that is past making atonement for. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”’

She paused suddenly, very much overwhelmed at her own temerity. She to take to preaching!

There was a long, long silence, except for the booming of a big bumble-bee, busy among the hedge of sun-flowers which shut off the view of Mrs. Boxford's vegetable garden, and the curious hum of invisible life that is always more or less audible in the hot, dry air of a summer day.

John sighed softly under his breath and looked around him, taking in the exquisite peace and beauty of the picture with a passionate yearning in his wan eyes. It was all so strange and wonderful—and not without its touch of the terrible too—to find himself—the drunken, soulless blackguard, the past associate of criminals—thieves who lived openly on the proceeds of their robberies, and so forth—to find himself in the solemn silence of this summer afternoon, *tête-à-tête*, on a footing of equality, with this pure, soft-voiced, dainty-minded girl. Could it be really he—the

strolling conjurer, the past comrade of welshers and pickpockets—who was sitting here, in social intercourse with this refined creature, who had ‘Lady’ written on every fold of her clean white gown, every tone of her exquisite voice, every thought of her pure, holy mind?

“‘White as snow,’” he said, breaking that long pause with a repetition of her last words. “‘White as snow’? That I shall never be. Repentance and pardon don’t come in the way of such as me. And yet—’ he paused, meeting her compassionate glance, and went on again, with a quick longing at his heart to be even as she would have him,—‘and yet, if I could cleanse myself of some of the scum that has settled on me in these last ghastly years, I would—I would try to be something better than I have been, if only out of gratitude to you, dear lady.’

Mary's face flushed again.

'I am glad!' she said, and she put out a quick, eager hand across the table to him. But he held back, though there came a faint reflection of her flush into his hollow cheeks.

'Am I forgetting myself again?' she asked, with a tremulous little laugh. 'Never mind! I won't ask you to shake hands again till you are better friends with yourself. I was so glad—that was all. Life shall be a beautiful thing for you yet; you shall see. And because you are doing this great thing for me, you will let me do something for you in return. You won't be proud with me. There must be some way in which you can help yourself, and you will let me help you to find it out. You will not run away again and hide yourself from your friend?'

'Dear lady——'

‘No; I will not have you call me that! All that sort of thing belongs to the old life—to-day we will start with the new. You will use my name in speaking to me; and I will use yours, with your permission.’

Her *bonhomie* won upon him; he gave her back her smile, though about his there was a substratum of self-depreciation. He could not forget so soon the distance between them, or the reverence due from him to her.

‘I cannot offer you a visiting-card—when those murderous ruffians stripped my pockets, they did it thoroughly—but my name is John Smith.’

‘Well, at any rate, there will be no difficulty about remembering it,’ she said, not allowing him to guess for an instant that she suspected the alias. ‘So they stripped your pockets? Mr. Boxford said

you had been robbed, as well as half-murdered. Did they take anything very important? Would you like to put the matter into the hands of the police?’

His smile this time came with a difference. The suggestion touched his sense of humour. He to apply to the police!

‘It would be useless now,’ he said. ‘There was a parcel of papers that I promised to deliver to the widow of a dead friend. The poor fellow died only the night before I came down here. For years he had heard nothing from his wife until that day—the day of his death—and then he only heard that she was staying with her people in Lincolnshire, and that they were all going to emigrate. They were to sail for Australia the first week in August. He had been a rough one, but, when the end came, his thoughts were all for the poor soul he had driven from him.

I promised to go to her, and he gave me all kinds of messages, and this bundle of papers; but the opportunity is lost. Even if I recovered the papers, which I should not do—the thieves who robbed me would not keep such incriminating evidence, you may be sure—but, even if I did, where would be the use? She is half-way to Australia by now.'

'It is a pity,' said Mary, softly; 'a promise to the dead is such a sacred thing.'

Her words started a new train of thought. He did not speak at once, and when he did, he spoke more to himself than to her.

'It is all part of the shadow that is on me,' he said, sombrously. 'My heart was set on doing it. Another man would have been allowed to carry out his promise. Such little pleasures are not for me.'

Mary pretended not to hear. She changed the conversation by asking him if he had any taste for music, and when she found that, upon this point at least, they were kindred spirits, she kept him talking brightly and pleasantly, until the sloping shadows warned her that it was time her patient was back in the dryer and safer atmosphere of his own room.

And perhaps, though he had put the thought into words—that his inability to keep his promise to his dead friend was ‘all part of the shadow that was on him’—he did not himself realise the full truth of the saying.

This one good thing that he had tried to do in all those years of bestial degradation, was it not ‘part of the shadow that was on him,’ that it should, in the time to come, tell against, rather than for his life’s happiness; that this attempt to serve a

friend should, in the long run, tell for his shame rather than his credit?

When he was back in bed again, and Mrs. Boxford came in to see that he had all that he needed for the night, he asked for his own black jacket, the one he was wearing when they found him in the woods.

And after the good woman was gone, and he was alone again, he sat up in bed and ripped a few stitches under the collar, and drew out a slender packet of newspaper from under the stiffened lining. There were five cuttings in the packet—two of some length, the others mere scraps, and they all referred to one subject—the search for Hagar Polwhele's accredited murderer, John Penhala.

Mary Fentimore was singing somewhere among the shadows in the garden under the open window of John Smith's room ;

and as he sat up in bed, reading his cuttings by the light of the August afterglow, he was conscious of the melody of her voice, entangling itself among the matter-of-fact phraseology of the newspaper scribe.

‘We understand it is the intention of the Government to offer a reward of a hundred pounds, for such information as shall lead to the arrest of John Penhala, the suspected murderer of Hagar Polwhele.’

He might almost have been reading them for the first time, judging by the close attention he gave them, and indeed there was a certain sense of freshness in their perusal. More than a year had passed since he sewed them up in the collar of his ‘property’ jacket, and the cruelty of them came now as something new to him. He had always known how hard and pitiless they were, but desuetude had a little blunted the keenness of their

edge, and now their merciless harshness smote him almost as if he had never fully realised it before.

And through the evening's quietness rose Mary's voice from the shadowy garden beneath, as he picked up the next and read—

‘It is reported at Carn Ruth that Morris Edyvean—the one-time sweetheart of the girl Hagar Polwhele, who was drowned at Carn Ruth last Christmas time—is about to leave his home, and start on a world-wide search after the man whom he accuses of her murder. He has dedicated himself, so it is said, to the one purpose—tracking down her murderer—and as he is an unusually powerful man, considerably over six feet in height, it would probably go hard with John Penhala if they should ever meet face to face.’

He read them all through, sitting on the

bed, with his knees hunched up to his chin, and when he had read them he still sat there, listening to the singing underneath, and wondering whether he should destroy them or not. He could hardly tell why he had taken such pains to keep them all these years, no more than he could tell why he had such a rooted disinclination to destroy them now. He had always known there was danger in keeping them, that was why he had taken such pains to secrete them, and yet he could not bring himself to make away with them.

Perhaps it was because they formed a link, the only one left, between his past and his present. Well, even so, it was folly to preserve them. What had he to hope for from his past? Nothing! Why then seek to keep himself in touch with it? Why, indeed! He did not know. He only knew that some influence, stronger

than his own common-sense, held back his hand, when he would have destroyed those ill-omened scraps of paper.

Mary was still singing as he tucked them back into their old hiding-place, and sewed up the opening in the seam. She was indoors now, the sweetness of her voice penetrated the walls but faintly as she sang, without accompaniment, Marguerite's jewel-song.

The music seemed to be calling him, urging him to leave the past behind him at once and for ever, and to live for the future alone. For a moment his needle paused,—should he destroy the incriminating evidence?—and then went on again. No, the cuttings were safe enough there.

Was it all a part of the shadow that was on him?

CHAPTER III.

A MATTER OF MUTUAL OBLIGATION.

IF, in the course of the next few weeks, John Smith succeeded in overcoming to a certain degree that distressing sense of his own social abasement, which had been so noticeable in his first interview with Miss Fentimore, if he was no longer so continuously conscious of the impassable distance—social and moral—which separated him from her, the praise or the blame of the change rested entirely with Mary herself. She had set her heart on the reclamation of this unfortunate sinner, and

she had begun her task by fostering and cultivating his self-respect. And now he was almost beginning to believe that there was some faint little hope for him after all, that he was to have a chance at last of leaving the bitter mistakes of the past behind him, a chance of making a fresh bid for the life of a man, rather than the existence of a brute beast.

Not that he was less really humble-minded than before—it would be a matter of years rather than weeks before he could shake off the humility which always came of a glance at the years behind him—but his sense of degradation was less conspicuous than it had been ; reverence there still was in his manner to Mary, but the old obsequiousness had disappeared ; he still recognised, and acknowledged by every word and look, her spiritual superiority, but he did not show such an ever

present consciousness of the social disparity between himself and his sweet, gracious hostess.

For in a sort of way he was still Mary's guest. That is to say, he had so persistently declared the impossibility of trespassing further on her generosity, that she had cast about for and found means of satisfying his scruples. For the last fortnight he had been working five or six hours a day at music-copying, Mary having suddenly discovered that it was necessary she should have all her operatic parts rewritten without delay. Before this supply of employment gave out she wrote to Mr. Burlington, asking him to allow her to make him a present of an entire set of new orchestral parts for some of his operas, a request he granted without demur, though not without a little wonder on the subject of 'Fentimore's little game.'

And so, day after day, John Smith sat out on the tiny lawn, in the shadow of the acacia-tree, in the mellow softness of the September atmosphere, with his music sheets spread out on the table before him, working as, in all his life, he had never worked before. And the peaceful repose—is there any time of the year that is so soothing in its influences as those weeks at the end of summer, before the final break-up comes? Those utterly still mornings, when the warm translucent mist lies like a veil over the face of the earth, waiting till the amorous touch of her lover the sun shall lift it, and leave her beauty disclosed in all the fulness of accomplishment; the swooning heat of the noon-day; the languorous softness of the afternoons; the seductive silence of the evenings, when the moon comes up, big and ruddy, mounting slowly through the layers of vapour till she lifts

herself clear of them, and sails smoothly on, across the solemn background of illimitable space—the birds scarcely chirp the day through, just now, their family cares are over for the year, and they are lazy as the result of a too easily satisfied appetite; the bees, thinned in numbers, go about their labour with far less bustle and obtrusiveness than when the summer's work was still before them; all nature seems to be resting, with the air of one conscious of a good day's work done, conscious of deserving rest.

And John Smith sat and worked at his copying amid this balmy sweetness, this repose of maturity, and some of the restful influences of his surroundings penetrated to his tempest-riven spirit, and brought some touch of healing with it.

And Mary, watching him from the shadowy recesses of her flower-filled par-

lour, would sigh and wish he would not work quite so hard; she could scarcely persuade him to exchange half-a-dozen words with her, until his day's allotted portion of work was finished.

Perhaps, though, this very abstinence made the enjoyment of the evening's companionship all the keener, when they sat out in the garden talking, or watched the moon rise in a delicious, companionable silence, or went into the fragrant little parlour and sang, to the accompaniment of the piano which Miss Fentimore had hired on her first arrival at the cottage.

And Miss Fentimore, hearing and taking heed unto John Smith's cultivated method and refined voice, was careful to give no expression to any conjectures she formed on the matter. If the whole truth must be told, she was considerably surprised to find how exceedingly well he sang. He

was a gentleman by birth and upbringing, of course ; she had known that all along. His slim finger-tips, his soft, easy speech, the spontaneity of his little attentions to her wants at the table—everything told the same story ; but, admitting that he was all she had guessed, his singing was still not to be accounted for in that fashion. He sang like one who had received a professional training. And yet there was no sign of the professional vocalist about him. His manners, but for those intermittent flashes of shame, were purely and simply those of a gentleman.

And it was because of this that matters were so difficult for missionary Mary. Occupation of some sort he must have—his determined attitude of independence demanded it—but occupation for a gentleman is, unhappily, so difficult to find.

What would he do when her vacation was over, and she had resumed her duties as a member of Mr. Burlington's opera company? Was he to slip away from his present standing place, back into the social quagmire from which she had but just rescued him? The thought made her clasp her hands in veritable agony of mind.

And while she was plaguing herself day and night over the problem of John Smith's ultimate fate, something happened which seemed to her, in the impulsive gratitude of the moment, to be an actual interposition of providence on behalf of her interesting *protégé*.

Mrs. Burlington, in writing to acknowledge a parcel of parts, mentioned a surprising piece of news.

'We are just now in a great state of suspense. Lascelles has lost his father,

and will of course come into the property at once. We have not heard from him yet—we saw the announcements of the death in the paper—but we are expecting a line from him daily, to tell us that he does not return to us. Wilfred is beside himself with anxiety. If it had happened at the beginning of the vacation, or even a month ago, we might have replaced him without much difficulty, but all the autumn engagements are made now, and the good men all booked, until Christmas at least, and we shall probably have to put up with some ghastly stick, who will ruin every scene he appears in.'

Mary received the letter by the afternoon post, and, as she gathered the full meaning of the news, a quick, sudden throb of gladness sent the blood flashing into her cheeks.

She glanced through the open window

at the quiet, absorbed figure under the acacia-tree. The very thing! If he would, oh, if he only would!

Without stopping to give it a second thought—how indeed should a second thought be needed for an arrangement so exactly in keeping with all the requirements of the case? Her state of delight was such that to wait to consider would have seemed almost like ingratitude—with her face alight with pleasure, and Mrs. Burlington's letter still in her hand, she ran out to the garden, speaking as she went.

'I must break rules, John Smith! Lay down your pen and listen to me. I have a great, a magnificent scheme to propose to you! How would you like an engagement as second tenor in Mr. Burlington's opera company?'

He did not answer her instantly, only lifted his head and looked at her smiling-

ly, with his finger still keeping his place on the sheet he was copying, awaiting further enlightenment. She was always pleasant to look at, this girl with the tender, luminous gray eyes, and the sweet mobile mouth, but, somehow, she had never looked quite so lovely in his sight as she looked at that moment, with the light of a great gladness on her face.

‘It is all going to fall out as we want it—just as it does in books,’ she went on, laughing gently at his look of blank non-comprehension; indeed, in her present state of joyousness she was glad to find some excuse for laughter. ‘Here are we puzzling our heads over the question of your future career, and then, at a breath, comes this suggestion, and there is no longer any difficulty at all. Mr. Burlington is in want of a second tenor, and I can secure the engagement for you, if you care to accept it.’

He understood now what it was she was offering him, and he saw at a glance what lay behind her words. And of all the benefits he was likely to reap from this sudden stroke of good fortune, only one stood out clearly in his mind—it would mean a continuance of the friendship between him and her. That separation in the immediate future, which he had been looking forward to with a dread unspeakable, would be avoided! And at the thought he rose hurriedly, with an inarticulate cry in his throat, and stood looking at her, afraid, even now, to believe, lest disappointment should follow.

And the alternations of passionate hope and fear that chased one another across his features, she took for signs of gladness because he saw at last, opening out before him, a chance of redeeming his past. And she felt a great thrill and glow of joy at

her heart, because she had been able to help him up the hill a little, the steep difficult hill that lies between blackguardism and self-respect.

‘Now don’t let us be childish and impulsive over this business,’ she cried, making a determined effort to treat the whole affair as a matter of business only. ‘There is really nothing to fuss about—it is purely a matter of mutual obligation—Mr. Burlington is in a bit of a fix for want of a tenor, you are anxious to obtain employment, and are just the man Mr. Burlington wants; and I want you to try for the engagement, because Mr. Burlington has been such a good friend to me, and I should so like to do him a good turn if I could. May I wire to Mrs. Burlington now, in your name?’

‘You shall do what seems best to you,’ he said, speaking at last, though speech

was still an effort to him, and his voice was low and muffled under the strain of his strong feeling. 'You are my good angel, Miss Fentimore; I leave myself in your hands. If you are not afraid of introducing such a blackguard to your friends—'

'I'm a little afraid of one thing,' she broke in, cutting him short with a touch of tender impatience at his self-depreciation—'you mayn't like the life. Though it will be an upward step from the wayside wizard business, still there are drawbacks. We are not all quite so—so—nice—so generous to each other, as we might be; and we are pretentious, too, some of us; and I think it is extremely probable that you will find more difficulty in putting up with our vulgar pretentiousness, than with the outspoken ruffianism that you talk about so often. Still, as I said, it is an

upward step, and who can tell what it may lead to in the future.'

'It seems to me,' said John, recovering himself somewhat from his first over-powering touch of emotion, but with such a softening of his lips and such a light in his eyes, as the reality of this dazzling hope came home to him, that it almost seemed to Mary she had never seen this man's face before, 'it seems to me, that you were sent into the world to be my salvation. Yes, indeed, you must let me speak out something of what is in my heart, or it will burst asunder from very fulness. It seems to me that the powers that rule the destinies of us mortals have suddenly lifted me out of the darkness of night, and set me in the light of the noon-day—and I'm wondering why. Unless indeed—' he added, with a swift touch of memory, and then checked himself, and looked at her

half doubtfully. Should he tell her his history, or should he remain silent? ‘You know,’ he went on again, after that pause of indecision, ‘I have never tried to excuse myself to you, I have never tried to make out that I am an innocent martyr, that I don’t deserve all that has befallen me. I do thoroughly deserve it, Miss Fentimore—I deserve every hour of wretchedness and misery that I have gone through since the day of my disgrace; I acted like a scoundrel, and I’ve had to put up with the consequences, and I’m not going to cry out about it. I can’t say I’ve taken my punishment like a man, but at any rate I’ve not whined and whimpered over it. But now, when, in spite of myself, I am almost beginning to believe that life—my life—is to be worth living again, I’ve got a mad wish to clear myself in your estimation on one point—I acknowledge that I deserved all

that has fallen on me, but I should like you to know that just that one piece of villainy, the suspicion of which drove me from my father's house, and made a social pariah of me, I am not guilty of; the one piece of wickedness which the whole world credits me with I did not commit; the one charge which has turned me into an Ishmaelite for all time I am innocent of. As surely as I am grateful for the inestimable blessing of your friendship, I swear this to you, I swear it solemnly! If, at any time in the future, you should learn who and what I really am, I ask you to remember this assertion of mine, and never to doubt it—the crime I am accused of I am innocent of! You believe me?’

‘Most thoroughly!’

‘Ah!’

It was a sigh of fervent relief, a sigh which spoke so eloquently of the burden

just cast off, that Mary's lip trembled a little for very pity.

And so he told half his story, and left half untold, forgetful of the danger of half-confidences.

'If you knew what it was to rest for years under an unjust accusation, and then to find some one—and some one whose good opinion is inestimably precious to you—who believes in your innocence! But it is only one more good gift from you to me—this belief in me. It sets me shaking sometimes when I think of all I owe you. My very soul you have given back to me—you found me a brute, and you have revived in me some touch of manhood. May God reward you as you deserve—as He alone can.'

They waited a little, looking at one another in a silence that was more eloquent of intense feeling than the most fervid

speech. Very white their faces were as they held each other in the close, lingering gaze of a complete unity of thought and feeling. Then he put his hand out, with a touch of something like entreaty in the action.

‘I have never dared to take your hand before. May I take it now, because of the hope of something better to come that is lifting my heart up so wonderfully? If there is less contamination in my touch than there was, it is due to the purifying power of a good woman’s influence.’

They stood awhile, hand in hand, eye to eye, with the autumn stillness like an invisible wall all about them, and they two alone in it. The silence between them was of that indescribable quality which invests the very vibrations of the heart with the power of speech—the only form of speech possible at such a moment.

And, presently, he grew terrified lest even that inarticulate recital of his feelings should grow too outspoken, and tell her more than she would deign to listen to of the state of his mind. A sudden fear of his own presumption fell on him. He dropped her hand, and lowered his eyes, and strode off hurriedly; through the gate, down the leafy lane, out of sight.

Mary stood there a breathless spell, wondering.

And the stirred wonder was still in her eyes when she turned and went into the house.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UPWARD STEP.

MISSIONARY MARY's scheme for the bettering of John's position prospered so exceedingly, that a cynical onlooker, had there been any such at hand, would have inevitably come to the conclusion that this dish of broth was of the devil's own brewing. From start to finish there was never a hitch in the negotiations between Mr. Burlington and his new tenor.

On the day following the receipt of the wire from Miss Fentimore, the manager

ran down to Chichester, met Mr. Smith by appointment at the principal music-shop, tried his voice, took his observations on the questions of appearance, presence, etcetera, and, concluding that Miss Fentimore's 'find' was likely to turn out an unusually satisfactory stop-gap, came to terms at once.

And in a small way John was a success. In his position as second tenor, it was hardly expected of him that he should make a sensation with the public; but he was expected to be note-perfect in his parts, to put himself into the background as much as was consistent with the construction of the scene, as often as he and the leading soprano occupied the stage together, and to be ready and willing to come to the rescue of the management in any emergency that might arise; and all these expectations he fulfilled to the letter.

For his heart was still aglow with gratitude to his good angel, and he worked like a horse to do credit to her recommendation.

And so it was that he quietly but surely attained a popular position in the company. Among the men he was 'A good sort of fellow; a bit close about himself; but as fair a chap in business as one could wish to meet'—which really meant that he carried his unobtrusiveness on the stage to the verge of self-effacement, and allowed other people to claim his share of the applause as well as their own. The honest truth of the matter was, that he cared nothing for the applause but a very great deal for Miss Fentimore's approval; and, so long as he got that, he was indifferent to the opinion of the audience.

With the ladies he was even a greater favourite than with the men. It is

possible that they too appreciated his consistent humble-mindedness on the stage, but they were also attracted by the quiet deference of his bearing towards them; and his handsome brown eyes, and waving chestnut hair, and close silky brown beard, and muscular figure certainly did their share, in securing for him the favourable opinion of the female members of the company.

And Mary watched his growing popularity and the increasing improvement in his morale with a sweet, secret delight. Every little advance he made was a source of great gladness to her, and she took more pride, immeasurably more, in every little success he scored with the audience than she had ever taken in her own greater triumphs. And he knew exactly how she felt on this point, and the knowledge spurred him on to such constant effort

and endeavour that it told with the audiences as, despite his modesty, it was bound to do, and Burlington declared openly that he had never had such a painstaking artist in his employ since he started management.

And in those days the Morelli-Fentimore feud waxed secretly stronger. Hitherto the Italian's jealousy had been a professional jealousy only; now it was something more. John's bright, wavy locks, and his sorrow-clouded glance, and the wistfulness of his unfrequent smile had attracted the fancy of the black-browed *prima-donna*, at the very moment of his presentation; and when to these advantages was added that marked unobtrusiveness in business, which left the applause entirely at her feet, her heart warmed to this operatic novice as it had never warmed to man before. It was a curious feeling she developed for him,

half patronage, half love. Hitherto her consuming ambition had filled her life, to the exclusion of all gentler passions, and perhaps it was because she so rarely smiled upon a man that now, when she did, she expected her favours to be accepted humbly and responded to with avidity.

But this was just what John could not and would not do. At first Morelli put his unresponsiveness down to modesty, and grew warmer in her encouragement accordingly; but when she found there was something besides his diffidence obstructing her wishes, she grew furious, and vowed to herself that he should find good cause, sooner or later, to regret the slight he had put on her.

And just about the time that Nita Morelli discovered the futility of her designs upon John, it happened that he had his first and last slight misunderstanding

with Burlington. Burlington wanted him to take off his beard for a certain part, and he refused point-blank.

‘But you can’t possibly play this part with a beard, my dear fellow!’ remonstrated the perplexed manager, with a glance at the other members of the company, who were gathered round awaiting the commencement of the rehearsal; ‘and you can hardly expect me to engage a man for this one especial part because you object to shave.’

‘I expect nothing,’ returned John, quietly. ‘You must consult your own convenience entirely.’

‘Do you mean that, sooner than take off your beard, you would throw the engagement up altogether?’

‘Yes,’ answered the second tenor, speaking entirely without bluster, but with absolute decision. ‘I’m afraid I do mean

that. Nothing you could offer me in the way of parts or salary would induce me to part with my beard.'

'Well, I'm blest!' ejaculated Burlington, vastly astonished at this sudden exhibition of stubbornness in one he had hitherto found so willing to oblige. He would doubtless have been still more surprised if he had known the real particulars of John's financial position, if he had known that there was nothing between his new tenor and penury but the weekly salary he paid him. However, he neither knew nor guessed at John's poverty.

'That's the worst of you chaps with means of your own, you're so confoundedly independent when you do take a whim into your heads. Now what is your objection to shaving? You're not going to tell me it's pure conceit, are you? Be-

cause if that's it, I can tell you you'd be a sight better looking without the beard than with it.'

John Smith smiled in a way which effectually disposed of that view of the matter.

'Then what the deuce are you jibbing at?' cried the irritated Burlington, with another glance at the interested faces around him. 'You're such an obliging chap, as a rule; what on earth do you want to set your back up over such a trifling thing as this for? It'll put me to no end of inconvenience, you know, to drag the man over from the number two company as often as we want to do this opera; and that's what I shall have to do if you won't give way. And the weeks he comes to us you'll have to take his place in the other crowd, and you won't like that, I expect.'

But John snatched eagerly at this way out of the dilemma. He would not object to the extra travelling at all, and he would make no trouble of an occasional week with the number two company—he would do anything, in short, to oblige Mr. Burlington, but dispense with his beard, and that he would not do.

Morelli, with the wound to her slighted vanity still raw, seized on the little incident and made all she could of it. To Burlington she held forth on John's obstinacy until the good-natured manager was sick of the subject; among the members of the company she threw out hints of Mr. Smith's possible motives for refusing to take off his beard, and showed her spite so plainly, that they joked among themselves over her disappointment. And she heard of the fun that was being made at her expense, and added

it as another mark to her score against the upstart amateur; which was her latest title for unfortunate John. But her venomous attacks fell upon barren ground—she was not popular with the company, and John Smith was, and they refused to believe that, because he would not shave, he must needs be a criminal of the deepest dye. And so the breeze passed over apparently without doing any damage. But circumstances, which seem slight enough in themselves at the time, occasionally prove of the gravest importance, when the sum total for and against a man's good name comes to be reckoned up.

As Miss Fentimore left the theatre at the end of that rehearsal John ventured to offer his escort; a thing he very seldom did, for he had been scrupulously careful, since joining the company, to avoid doing anything that could bring her

name into association with his. It would be a queer return to make for her unparalleled goodness to him, to lower her fair name by bringing it down to the level of his. This was the reason he had never sought her society privately, striving to content himself with a word or two spoken amid the chatter of the green-room, or the hurry and bustle of departure and arrival on the railway platforms, during their weekly journeyings from town to town. But to-day he felt bound to get a few words with her in private, come what might of it, and so he asked to be allowed to walk to her lodgings with her.

There was less familiarity between them now than there had been in the Love Lane days, and they were both conscious of a touch of shyness as they turned away from the stage door, and set their faces towards Prince's Street—for the little argument

happened during their stay in Edinburgh. All the world seemed to be abroad, this crisp December day, on the wide pavement of the most beautiful street in the world, and as Miss Fentimore and her cavalier threaded their way through the well-dressed crowd they came in for a fair share of observation. For Mary's portrait smiled at the passers from all the music-sellers' windows in the town, and if John was not equally well known, his calling was guessed at by the shrewd Scotch folks; and they were almost as interested in him as in his fair companion. But this morning they were scarcely conscious of the observation they were exciting, they were too deeply absorbed in their own affairs.

‘I hope you are not annoyed with me for what happened this morning,’ said John, as soon as they were well clear of the theatre. ‘It must have seemed so

churlish to refuse to do what Burlington asked, and yet——’

‘But that is nonsense!’ broke in Mary, brightly. ‘Mayn’t a man follow his own wishes about the length of his own beard? How could you think I should be annoyed with you for such a thing?’

John smiled his wistful smile round at her, and glanced away again, along the streams of people coming and going ahead of him, before he answered her.

‘You see, Miss Fentimore, that is just what I can’t do.’ There was keen pain underlying the quietness of his voice, and Mary suddenly found herself wishing he would not say what he was going to. ‘That is what I wanted to explain to you. If it was merely a matter of personal whim or liking, do you think I would have held out about it? Do you think I set so little store by all you have done for me, as to

risk the loss of it for the indulgence of a paltry bit of vanity? Did you hear what good-natured old Crawford said about my beard preserving my throat from mischief? Well, that is the real truth of the case; though perhaps not in just the manner he meant. Have you never realised what an extraordinary change a beard works in a man's appearance? If I were to dare to take my beard off—you remember what I told you the afternoon you came out to me under the acacia-tree, and first suggested that I should try for this engagement? Something about an accusation hanging over my head, an accusation of a crime I am innocent of?’

By her face he saw that she did, and went on without waiting a reply.

‘It is because of that that I hold on so desperately to the disguise of my beard. Preserve my throat indeed! It does more

than that, Miss Fentimore, it preserves my neck.'

She turned her glance to his in blank inquiry, and, reading in a flash the full meaning of his words, she cried out as if he had struck her, and reeled a step apart from him.

Quick as thought he twisted her round towards the shop-windows, and placed himself as a shield between her white, terror-stricken face, and the curious observation of the passing crowd. He had not anticipated her terror, and it came as a shock to him; but he did not lose his self-possession as she had done.

'It never struck me that it might frighten you,' he said, putting her hand under his arm, and making a great display of interest in the contents of the window. 'I would not have told you if I had known, but I thought you had

guessed. I forgot that you would most likely be half dead with terror to find yourself in the presence of a suspected——'

'No!' she cried, under her breath. 'No! don't say it! Hush! let me steady myself.'

The hand clutching so desperately at his coat-sleeve, and the wide-stretched, piteous eyes fixed so searchingly on him, as if she would fain persuade herself that he was only trifling with her, hurt him horribly. This was to be her attitude towards him for the future—a terrified pity, or a pitying terror. He was to be a waking nightmare to her! Ah, but he would not though—he would take himself out of her life altogether, rather.

'Poor, scared little child,' he said, tenderly, forgetting his old humility as the necessity for protection arose, 'poor

frightened little woman! Why did I pounce the hideous truth out on you like that? Blundering brute that I am! I ought to have known how it would shock you. Don't look at me like that—people will wonder—and—it cuts me like a knife.'

'It is terrible!' she muttered, dropping her eyes in obedience to his hint. 'It is ghastly—awful! I never guessed at—that. I never dreamt your danger was so extreme as that. Oh, why do you stay in the country at all? Why don't you go away to the other side of the world, where you would be in comparative safety?'

'*My* safety? Is it *my* safety you are thinking of? Is it the thought of *my* danger that frightened you so?' The discovery sent a quick glow through him. Thank God, she was frightened for him rather than of him! 'Was it your fear

for me that knocked you over like that? It comes upon me in the same way sometimes, even now. But that is only when the memory flashes into my mind all in an instant—without a moment's warning, and I see myself already at the finish, paying the penalty for a crime I did not commit. When the recollection of the fate hanging over me comes on me suddenly in that way, I go faint and sick with the horror of it. At other times, when I force myself to face the possibility quietly, as now, I can keep my cowardice under control.'

'Cowardice?' she repeated, smiling wanly up at him. 'Cowardice?'

They were walking on again now, and had nearly arrived at the end of their journey.

'Well,' he said, answering her smile with one which had plenty of manhood in it,

‘ I don’t know what else you call the fear of death. It is a thing that must come to us sooner or later, and since we must die, it ought not to make so much difference whether one dies between the sheets, or in the open air with a rope——’

‘ Oh, for God’s sake, don’t, I pray of you !’ she gasped. ‘ If you talk like that, I shall drop dead at your feet.’

Her intense anguish was such that he instinctively drew back a step, the better to read the expression of her face. She stood in the open doorway of the Edinburgh house, with the dense shadow of the public stairway behind her. Strangely white and ethereal her face looked against the blackness of the dark entry, but there was something besides terror in it—something which overwhelmed him in a sudden rush of wildly conflicting emotions, which, passing, left him shaking,

with a feeling at his heart as if a hand of ice had grasped it.

They had just been talking of cowardice—this would be cowardice indeed, to take advantage of the knowledge which had that instant flashed in on his understanding!

‘You must make allowances for me,’ she went on, faintly, and he knew just the pleading smile she wore though he was not looking at her; for, amid all the blind bewilderment of the moment, he had sense enough to keep his gaze away from hers, knowing the trouble in her face might be too much for him. ‘I can’t control myself as you can. I go weak and faint when you say those things. And yet, if you could talk to me about it a little, it might be that—— Will you come in for a few minutes? We can talk better upstairs; and I can’t send you away like this.’

She turned and went up the stairs, going slowly, and holding on to the hand-rail as if she felt the need of its assistance, and he followed her.

It was the first time he had been in a room inhabited by her since the days in the Sussex cottage ; and even at that moment, amid all the rack and hurry of his brain, he was conscious, as he entered the large, light room looking out on to the Leith road, of the subtle influence of her personality surrounding him.

In what it consisted he could not tell, he only felt that if he had stumbled accidentally into this room, without any previous knowledge on the matter, his instinct would have informed him of the individuality of the occupant.

She went over to a large, old-fashioned couch between the high windows, and sank on it with an air of exhaustion, and

pulled off her gloves and removed her veil and hat, and pushed her trembling fingers through the luxuriant masses of hair above her brow, as if even that weight were too much for her head just then.

‘I have often wondered how and when you would next pay me a visit,’ she said, smiling sorrowfully across the big room at him. ‘I never thought of such circumstances——’

‘You know now why I never came,’ he put in, as she broke off in sheer inability to go on. ‘Even apart from this, there is so much in my life that should keep me from pressing my society on a pure, good woman; but, if there were nothing else, this would be enough. The blight that is on me is contagious. It might spread at any time to those who associate with me. I have tried to keep you free of this

risk—to keep you outside the circle of shadow that hems me in.’

‘ I understood something of that,’ she said; ‘ not all, but something of it I understood; and I was sorry; and I am sorry still. Won’t you come over here by the windows, there is always something to be seen in the streets below, and—I want to say things I dare not say aloud.’

He came and stood close by the head of the couch, gazing blindly across the wide space of the road beneath the windows, seeing nothing of the bustle of the street below, conscious only of her white up-turned face close under him.

‘ First of all I want to scold you,’ she went on. ‘ Why did you not tell me the whole truth at first? There must be some way out of this terror—there *must* be, there *shall* be! We will find it together—you and I. Two heads are better than

one. If you had only told me this when you told me the rest, you might have been a free man now, able to throw off the burden you have carried so long.'

Her beautiful trust in him touched him to the core of his being, but at her reasoning he only shook his head, and drew in a long, tremulous breath.

'You don't know,' he said, quietly, 'and I can't explain matters to you. If I could, you would see how hopeless things are for me.'

'Nothing is hopeless!' she cried. 'I will not believe it.'

Again he shook his head slightly.

'I'm afraid my case is. There are other influences at work—the desire for justice is not the only motive—there is the longing for revenge to be reckoned with.'

'Revenge against an innocent man?'

'Ah, you don't understand! Innocent

of that one crowning iniquity against human life? Yes. But guilty still of a great deal that calls out for vengeance. There is a man living whose longing to be revenged on me is such, that he would swear away my life without a moment's hesitation.'

'Swear away your life?'

'He would swear—he has already sworn—that he saw me, that he himself saw me, commit the crime I did not commit.'

'He would swear away your life with a lie?'

'To be revenged on me for those other sins, yes. There is nothing half-hearted about a Cornishman's revenge.'

'If I could but see him!'

'It would be no use.' He let his glance fall for an instant to her pale face, and pictured her *vis-à-vis* with Morris Edyvean.

'To open communication with the past

would only be to put the noose round my neck. There is nothing for it but to bear the burden as best I can.'

She put her hand over her eyes, and murmured brokenly,

'It is terrible—terrible!'

'Yes ; sometimes it is very terrible. If I were altogether innocent of wrong-doing in the matter, I could bear it better. But there is always the memory that, though I did not in very deed take away a fellow-creature's life, I am responsible for the circumstances that led to her death. And sometimes I think the stain of blood-guiltiness is on my soul, as truly as if I had wilfully hurried that poor child into eternity, and that in the end I am bound to be hanged for it. Now and then, when I am alone, this idea—that my end is pre-ordained, that, do what I will, I shall hang ultimately—gets such a hold on me, that

I feel madness coming on, and I rush away, out into the streets, anywhere where there are people, and talk to a shoe-black, or a crossing-sweeper, or anybody who will listen to me till the mad terror passes again.'

She still sat with her hand over her eyes, and he thought she was crying. It was the first time he had known her give way to such a weakness. It smote him with a new touch of sorrow to know that the unusual tears were shed on his account. If it had but been possible for him to gather her up in his arms and comfort her! But such joy was not for him. He stood looking down at her bent head for a short space, with his eyes full of a grievous heart-hunger, a heart-hunger which he must endure to the end in silence, because he did not dare make an effort to satisfy it.

‘I suppose it is part of the cloud that is over me,’ he said, ‘that no one can be good to me without suffering for it. See what distress I have brought on you—you to whom I owe a gratitude past the wit of man to measure. But that at least I can prevent in the future, and I will. God bless you for your sweet sympathy! It makes me realise that I cannot be wholly lost, when such a one as you can weep for me.’

He stooped and kissed the back of her hand, as it still sheltered her face from observation, and, turning swiftly, strode without a backward glance or a faltering step from the room.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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Penhala a wayside wizard



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